



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

TRADE UNIONS AND THE STATE IN ETHIOPIA, 1946-1991

BY
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ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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SUBMITTED TO

THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY

ADVISOR

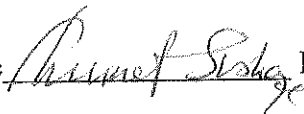
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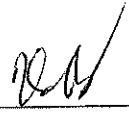
Addis Ababa University
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ACRONYMS

AALC-	African American Labour Center
AATUF-	All-Africa Trades Union Federation
AAU-	Addis Ababa University
ADF-	African Development Fund
AEPA-	All Ethiopian Peasant Associations
AESM-	All Ethiopian Socialist Movement
AETU-	All Ethiopian Trade Unions
AFL-CIO-	American Federation Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations
ANC-	African National Congress
ATUC-	African Trade Unions Confederation
CELU	Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions
CETU-	Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions
CIA-	Central Intelligence Agency
COPWE-	Commission for Organizing the Workers' Party of Ethiopia
COSATU-	Congress of South African Trade Unions
EDU-	Ethiopian Democratic Union

EEF	Ethiopian Employers' Federation
EELPA-	Ethiopian Electric Light and Power Authority
ELU-	Ethiopian Labour Unions
ENALA-	Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency
EPLF-	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF-	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP-	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ETA-	Ethiopian Teachers Association
ETU-	Ethiopian Trade Unions
EWRU-	Ethiopian Workers Revolutionary Unions
FDRE-	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FRLA-	First Revolutionary Liberation Army
GDR-	German Democratic Republic
HS IU-	Haile Selassie I University
HVA	Handelsvereeninging Amsterdam
ICFTU-	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
IES-	Institute of Ethiopian Studies

ILO-	International Labour Organizations
IMF-	International Monetary Fund
IMTC-	Imperial Motor Transport Company
IWMA-	International Working Men's Association
KFL-	Kenyan Federation of Labour
MAAG-	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MOE-	Ministry of Education
MOFA-	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOI-	Ministry of Interior
MOLSA-	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MNCD-	Ministry of National Community Development
NCOs-	Non-Commissioned Officers
NDR-	National Democratic Revolution
NLC-	National Literacy Campaign
NLU-	National Labour Union
NSCs-	National Security Commission
NUEUS-	National Union of Ethiopian University Students

OAU-	Organization of African Unity
OATUU-	Organization of African Trade Union Unity
PDRE-	Peoples Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
PFP-	Policy Framework Paper
PMAC-	Provisional Military Administration Council
POMOA-	Provisional Office for Mass Organizations Affairs
SALF-	Somali Abbo Liberation Front
SAP-	Structural Adjustment Program
SMSC-	Supreme Military Strategic Committee
TGE-	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TMS-	Tāfāri Mākonān School
TPLF-	Tegray People's Liberation Front
TUC-	Trade Union Congress
UAW-	United Automobile Workers
UCAA-	University College of Addis Ababa
UNESCO-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA-	United States of America

USSR-	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USUAA-	University Students Union of Addis Ababa
WFTU-	World Federation of Trade Unions
WPE-	Workers' Party of Ethiopia
WSLF-	Western Somalia Liberation Front
YMCA-	Young Men's Christian Association

GLOSSARY

<i>abbo</i>	-a shortend name of a saint, Abunä Gäbrä Mämfäs Qedus
<i>abyot</i>	-revolution
<i>afänegus</i>	-'king's mouth', supreme court judge
<i>amolè</i>	-bar of salt
<i>asäsa</i>	-search campaign
<i>ato</i>	-title the same as Mr.
<i>aṭäqaly</i>	-whole
<i>awaj</i>	-decree/proclamation
<i>awraja</i>	-sub province
<i>blatta</i>	-title of government officials signifying educational brightness
<i>blatèn gèta</i>	-clerical title, also given to government officials signifying educational brightness
<i>çat</i>	-a stimulant plant
<i>çesäñña</i>	-tenant or landowner who pays tax or tribute to someone other than the state because his ownership rights were considered to be secondary.
<i>däbo or wonfāl</i>	-agricultural labour groups
<i>däjjazmač</i>	-'commander of the gate', politico-military title
<i>dämwäz</i>	-a wage earned by providing labour service
<i>därg</i>	-committee
<i>edder</i>	-a voluntary self help association established among a certain community
<i>ekul araš</i>	-a farmer who works with the land owner and shares what he produces equally.
<i>elf</i>	-a type of corvee labour that the peasants used to transport the personal materials and goods of the lord in times of peace and provisions in times of war.
<i>equb</i>	-credit association

<i>erbo araš</i>	-a farmer who works with the land owner and takes a quarter of what he produces.
<i>gäbbar</i>	-taxpayer; land on which tax was paid to the state in labour and/or in kind.
<i>geber</i>	-land tax
<i>gari</i>	-a cart used to transport materials
<i>gendä-bäl</i>	-land owned by peasant soldiers for which tax was paid in military service
<i>gult</i>	-estate over which a royal favorite would exercise full property rights and administrative authority; fief
<i>gultäñña</i>	-a person who had <i>gult</i> right
<i>hudad</i>	-land set aside for the supply of the royal court worked by landowning peasants; labour rendered on such land.
<i>kefel</i>	-part of something
<i>kefelä hägär</i>	-province
<i>ketät</i>	-mobilization
<i>labadär/wäzadär/särtoadär</i>	-a person who earn a living by selling his labour
<i>lej</i>	-'child', title often used by sons of royal family and nobility
<i>madga</i>	-a local material that resembles basket and used to measure wheat or barley or any other crop.
<i>mahebär</i>	-social or religious association.
<i>mäñen</i>	-it was one type of feudal dues practiced in Ethiopia until the early twentieth century. It refers the grass and firewood which were provided for the lords and his companions by the <i>gäbbars</i> whenever they travelled through their village.
<i>märädaja</i>	-social welfare
<i>näçe šiber</i>	-white terror
<i>qäbällè</i>	-the lowest administrative unity in Ethiopia
<i>qäy šiber</i>	-red terror
<i>qonçära häläfi</i>	-machete controller
<i>ras</i>	-'head', highest politico-military title

<i>rim</i>	-land over which the possessor has usufructuary rights indefinitely or for a specific period of time.
<i>sämon</i>	-land under the control of the Church or land over which the Church exercised taxation rights
<i>säratäña</i>	-labourer/worker
<i>siso araš</i>	-a farmer who works with the land owner and takes a third of what he produces.
<i>taṭäq</i>	-be girded
<i>yäketät awaj</i>	-mobilization decree
<i>woräda</i>	-district
<i>woyezäro (W/ro)</i>	-title the same as Mrs.
<i>zämäča</i>	-campaign
<i>zègenät</i>	-an institution in which an impoverished and landless class of the society had become <i>zègas</i> [serfs] for the owner of the land or lord in medieval northern Ethiopia.

KEY TO TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM

INSTITUTE OF ETHIOPIAN STUDIES

I have used the following IES transliteration system.

I. The seven sounds of the Ethiopic alphabet are represented as follows:

1st ሰ = Bă

2nd ሰ• = Bu

3rd ሰ። = Bi

4th ሰ፥ = Ba

5th ሰ፥ = Bè

6th ሰ፥ = Be

7th ሰ = Bo

II. Palatalized sounds are represented as follows:

ሸ = šă

ሹ = čă

ሺ = ŋă

ሻ = zhă

ሼ = jă

III. Glotalized sounds are represented as follows:

ቀ = qä

ጠ = ɬä

ጨ = ɕä

ፀ = ʂä

ጰ = pä

IV. Gemination should always be indicated by doubling

Examples: Gojjam Käbbädä

V. General Examples

ጠላ = *Tälla*

ደጃዝማች = *Däjjazmač*

ሸለቆ = *Šäläqo*

ቀኛዝማች = *Qäñnazmač*

ጨለንቆ = *Çälänqo*

ፀሐይ = *Šähäy*

ገዥ = *Gäzhe*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research would not have been completed in its present form without the generous assistance and guidance of many people, to all of whom I express my heartfelt indebtedness. My deepest gratitude and appreciation, however, goes to my advisor, Professor Bahru Zewde, Emeritus Professor at Addis Ababa University, for his unreserved advice and supervision. His unparalleled patience to all my irregularities has always given me hope and strength to go forward and complete this research. I doubt if I could have brought this project to fruition without him. I can only say THANK YOU!!!

I am also very much indebted to a number of individuals and friends whose names are numerous to mention here, for their genuine support and constant encouragement. Particularly, I am very grateful to Professor Tekeste Negash and Kumelachew Alene who sent me valuable books from Sweden and America respectively, and Dr. Badema Belay also deserves my indebtedness for his support in translating some Amharic quotations into English.

I would also like to express my profound gratitude to all my informants who shared with me their reminiscences without any reservation. In this regard, Gebre Selassie Gebre Mariam and Abraham Makonnen deserve special mention. Besides responding to all the questions I raised to them, they helped me in finding other pertinent informants who were residing both in Ethiopia and abroad.

My heartfelt thanks and warmest appreciation also go to all my family members for their constant moral and material support from the beginning of my school life all the way to the completion of my terminal degree. I am particularly grateful to my mother, Enatnesh Belay who has persistently encouraged me to finish my study on time and begin a new life that she has been wishing for me.

Finally, I would like to thank Mizan-Tepi University for sponsoring of my graduate studies and the Graduate School of Addis Ababa University for providing me with the funds to carry out the fieldwork for this research.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a comprehensive study of an important chapter of the labour history of Ethiopia. It examines the history of labour relations in Ethiopia, particularly the relation between trade unions and the state from 1946 to 1991. Based primarily on the CETU, MoLSA and IES archives, union publications (Voice of Labour), magazines, student papers and other publications of the period and pertinent oral informants, it traces the genesis and evolution of incipient capitalism, wage labour, working class, workers' organization and labour relations in Ethiopia. It also attempts to investigate the changes and continuities in the relation between CELU and AETU/ ETU on the one hand and the imperial regime and the military regime on the other respectively. This dissertation argues that even though labour relation is a tripartite relation involving workers and their confederation, employers and their federation and the state, the Ethiopian case was quite different in that it took place only between workers and their confederation on the one hand and the state on the other. Since the state was the largest employer in the country, it dominated the employers' federation during the imperial regime and virtually over took it during the military regime. The dissertation shows that the relation between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia was full of conflict and hostility as the former often resisted the intervention of the latter and sought to establish an independent labour movement in the country and as the latter often tried to control the former and enhance economic development at the expense of it. Though the study of labour relations in general and labour history in particular is showing significant progress in the rest of the world, it is not yet given due attention in Ethiopia. Therefore, this study may benefit historians and scholars from various disciplines and future researchers on the subject as a starting point. Statesmen, social workers, labour policy makers may also utilize the findings for public benefit.

PREFACE

This thesis is a historical study of labour relations in Ethiopia. It mainly aims at reconstructing the history of the intricate relation between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia from 1946 to 1991. The point of departure, 1946, is the date of the establishment of the first trade union, the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Workers' Union, and the final date, 1991, saw the end of the military regime and its command economy in Ethiopia. Exploring the changes and continuities in the relation between the national confederation and the two successive regimes which controlled power in the period under study is the major focus of this study.

Most of the sources used for this research were collected from September 2014 to January 2016. It took me altogether nearly seventeen months. In addition, when ever the already collected data needed to be reconciled and consolidated, I consulted again some archives for a brief period during the write up. Archival materials of the MoLSA, CETU, IES and ENALA were easily accessed and extensively employed for this thesis. On the other hand, I faced difficulty to access the archives of a number of privatized industries which were kept under the protection of the FDRE Board of Trustee for Public Enterprises. The gaps created by the inaccessibility of such archival sources were, however, filled with oral information gathered from pertinent informants.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the early development of the Ethiopian labour movement from 1946 to 1962. It mainly assesses the antecedents of workers' organization, the formation of covert and overt labour unions and the endogenous and exogenous factors that influenced the imperial government to give due attention to labour issues and introduce labour policies. The second chapter discusses the role of the first labour relations

decree, Decree No.49/1962 for the establishment of a number of local unions and the national confederation, the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU). It also assesses the attempted general strike of July 1963 that marked the beginning of serious conflict between CELU and the state.

The role of the Ethiopian workers and CELU in the Ethiopian revolution from 1974-1977 is briefly discussed in the third chapter. The solidarity that CELU had with the students and leftist political parties during the revolution is also given due emphasis in this part of the thesis. The fourth chapter deals with the relation between trade unions and the military regime. The contribution of workers in the Somalia-Ethiopian war, the formation of COPWE, WPE and PDRE is discussed in some detail. In addition, it also deals with proletarian internationalism and the observance of May Day in Ethiopia and how the regime controlled AETU and reduced it to one of its agencies. The last chapter deals with the role that trade unions and the state played in educating the industrial labour force in Ethiopia. It gives due emphasis to union education, workers' education and labour studies.

The main objective of this research is to assess the relation between national confederation and the state in Ethiopia from 1946 to 1991. Attempts have been made to critically examine the relationship between CELU and AETU/ETU on the one hand and the imperial regime and military regime on the other respectively. Apart from assessing the usually observed antagonistic relation between trade unions and the state, an attempt is made to present some important issues on which trade unions and the state worked together for mutual benefit and the benefit of the country.

Needless to say, the labour history of Ethiopia has been denied due attention by practicing historians. In addition, even though the confederation has been led by dozens of labour leaders, no one has yet written a comprehensive history of the Ethiopian labour movement. True, Beyene Solomon attempted to write the history of the Ethiopian labour movement, but he devoted the major part of the book to his own autobiography. Moreover, though a number of BA theses were produced on different local unions by students of the Department of Sociology, Economics, Law and Political Sciences and International Relations, they were not written with historical methodologies and did not show the changes and continuities in the Ethiopian labour movement in a comprehensive manner. In this research, it is hoped to address the gaps so far created in labour history of Ethiopia in general and the relation between trade unions and the state in particular in a comprehensive manner by employing historical methodologies. Thus, though much remains to be done on the field, I hope this research will contribute to our understanding of the labour history of Ethiopia.

INTRODUCTION

This study endeavors to assess the history of the relationship between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia. It covers the years between 1946 and 1991, which were crucial in the organization and reorganization of workers to achieve their common interests. The period also witnessed the organization and reorganization of the national labour confederation in order to achieve its autonomy in the struggle against two different regimes [Imperial and Military] which controlled power in Ethiopia in the period under study. It has taken the years 1946 and 1991 as departure and terminal dates of the study. The year 1946 is very significant in the history of trade unionism in Ethiopia as it marks the birth of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Workers' Union, the first trade union in the history of the country. The year 1991 marks the downfall of the military regime and the coming to power of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) which dismissed workers organizations that were reorganized under the cardinal principles of socialism.¹ This study focuses, mainly, on discussing the history of the relation between the national labour confederation which now comprises 9 federations, 1429 affiliated local unions and a total membership of 473,626, and the successive regimes which ruled the country in the period under study. Nevertheless, the history of the relation between some local trade unions and the state are also discussed in relation with the early development of labour organization, labour movement, labour education and strike.

The introductory part presents a synoptic view about the genesis of trade unions in the Western world and Africa. It gives due emphasis to how workers posed a sustained challenge to the state

¹*Nägarit Gazëta*, Labour Proclamation No. 64/1975, 6th December 1975, p. 1.

to get unionized, recognized and legalized. Thereafter, a survey of the historiography of trade union-state relations in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular is presented. This is followed by the assessment of the conceptual framework which employs two central themes i.e 'labour control and labour resistance.' The Marxist approach of labour relations is also discussed so as to conceptualize the relations between trade unions and the military regime. Finally, the scope and methodology of the study are dealt with. And, it concludes with the discussion of sources.

The Genesis of Trade Unionism: A Synoptic View

Trade unionism is an offshoot of industrial capitalism. It developed as a direct consequence of the industrial revolution. As the industrial revolution got momentum, the proletariat or the working class which emerged as a result of the revolution began to engage in collective action against the bourgeoisie class or the owner of capital and the means of production. The coming together of a number of workers in England to defend their common interest ultimately resulted in the birth of trade unions around the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.² Several scholars have defined trade unions differently either on the basis of their functions or the legal grounds through which they are instituted. The first definition is believed to have been given on the basis of trade unions' functions. It appeared for the first time in Sidney and Beatrice Webb's writings in the 1890s. They defined trade union as "... a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives."³

²John Rule, *The Laboring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850* (London; New York: Longman: 1986), p. 255; Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labour History, Vol. I* (Boston: Leiden Publisher Ltd, 2008), p. 22.

³Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London: Longmans, 1920), p. 1.

Nevertheless, when and where the first trade union was established is still unknown. A few prominent labour historians have, however, put forward their own assumptions on the matter. In fact, associations of those engaged in particular trades have very long traditions. For instance, Marcel van der Linden traced the historical origin of this kind of workers' association back to May 1345 when the captain (as he was known) of the Italian city of Florence arrested the wool-carder Ciuto Brandini and his two sons because of establishing a union with its dues and elected leader in *Arte della Lana* and instigating other workers in Florence to join them.⁴ Similar workers' associations which were referred as guilds also appeared in medieval Great Britain. But, the objectives and activities of medieval guilds and associations were very different compared to the objectives and activities of modern trade unions. Medieval guilds engaged in social activities to create a friendly community; rather than engaging in negotiations of conditions of employment and improving the lives of member workers. Thus, a trade union with the existing structure, objective and purpose is believed to have emerged around late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the rapid transition to an industrial society created the need for organization which could defend the interests of workers and meet their aspirations.⁵

Regardless of the different explanations of its origin, the rise of modern trade union with its existing characteristics is linked with the outbreak of the Industrial Revolution. It is believed to have been started in Great Britain around the second half of the Eighteenth century. The British economy which was the only effectively industrialized one by the late eighteenth century began to dominate the rest of the world. Yet, in the year between 1780 and 1832 most English working people came to feel an identity of their own and designated a different identity for their

⁴Linden, p. 221.

⁵N. Robertson and J.L Thomas, *Trade Unions and Industrial Relations* (London: Business Books Ltd, 1968), pp. 7-8.

employers and rulers.⁶ Following in the footsteps of Britain, the United States of America (USA) and a good part of Western and Central Europe had stepped into the industrial revolution in the early nineteenth century.⁷

Industrial revolution enhanced the production of goods using machines in unprecedented degree and this in turn brought an increment in the wealth of the owners of the industries. On the other hand, it also brought serious social consequences on some sections of the society. It resulted in discontent and misery among the urban and industrial poor. Consequently, spontaneous revolts of the industrial workers began to appear in Europe. The workers expressed their resentment violently against the owners of industries who exploited them with very little wages and under precarious working conditions. The shift from manual labour to machines increased the profits of the capitalists at the expense of the labourers. The newly installed machines increased the quality and quantity of production in each industry and this in turn contributed a lot to the development of European countries. On the other hand, they also created unprecedented levels of high unemployment in the Western world.⁸ Consequently, workers who lost their work began to come together and fight against their employers so as to defend their interests.

By the early nineteenth century, shoe makers, printers, paper makers, ship builders, tailors and other artisans had already established regular societies though there was no legal basis for such associations. By 1814, for instance, artisans in London and its environs developed new consciousness that ascribed wages to organizational power. This consciousness was clearly

⁶E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the British Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), p. 11; E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe, 1789-1848* (London: Redwood and Burn Limited, 1962), pp. 68-69.

⁷Hobsbawm, pp. 68-69.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 30-39.

evident in the links established both between trade societies in the same craft and with other trades so as to get financial assistance in times of difficulties.⁹

Other political developments, particularly, the French Revolution of 1789, had also considerable influence in developing workers' consciousness concerning their class interests. Moreover, local businessmen and farmers sympathized with the suffering of the workers and they too plunged into the workers' uprising of the 1840s. In fact, the workers' reaction to the new system had begun right from the onset of industrialization in Western Europe.¹⁰ In Britain, for instance, the Luddites who were usually referred to as militant workers expressed their resentment against the employers by smashing the machines which they thought were responsible for the misery they endured. These mechanisms which were used by the Luddites in struggling against their employers were also supported by the urban poor and farmers who considered themselves too as victims of the emerging selfish capitalists.¹¹

More importantly, since the 1830s workers had started to take collective actions and bargain with their employers. The rise of the Chartist Movement in England in 1838 further strengthened and led the already spontaneously started trade unions' struggle in a more coordinated and peaceful method. With the drawing up of a charter with six points in 1838, working men's association in London inaugurated a well coordinated and widely supported movement at the national level. Though they were not trade unionists, the protagonists of the Chartist Movement had supported the fragmented trade unions at factory level to form a strong national trade union confederation. They adopted general strike as a mechanism to force the government to hear their voices. In the

⁹John Rule, *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850* (London: New York: Longmans, 1986), p. 267.

¹⁰Hobsbawm, p. 38.

¹¹Rule, pp. 263-267.

years between 1838 and 1842, for instance, they pressurized the government to fulfill the demands of trade unions by organizing general strikes. In fact, the 1842 strike was the most successful strike in the history of the Chartist Movement. It helped them to win higher wages and better working conditions. Nevertheless, though millions of workers signed petitions and actively participated in the strike, the movement did not bring long lasting solution to the problems of trade unions. Worse still, the government used force to quell demonstrations. Regardless of the repressive laws and the continuous intimidations made by the government, however, the Chartist movement pushed the impetus of the working class struggle in Britain to a higher level. Their unrelenting and protracted struggle, eventually, resulted in the establishment of the United Kingdom Alliance of Organized Trades in Sheffield in 1866 as a steppingstone for the establishment of a national confederation. Yet, they also forced the government to decriminalize trade unions in 1867 and this was soon followed by the birth of the British workers' national confederation, Trade Union Congress (TUC) in 1868.¹²

Compared to Great Britain, the beginning of labour movements in the United States of America (USA) was very late and also adopted a different format of unionization. Even though some scholars traced the origin of labour relations in the country back to the birth of the nation itself, no significant movement was observed among the workers for almost a century despite the unprecedented political and economic developments registered by the country in the same period. Until the late nineteenth century, unions were not considered as legitimate organizations in the country by employers and workers who demanded their corporate interests were also punished by the legal establishment. At the beginning of the 1850s, however, a few national trade unions were formed though they failed to survive for a long time. The 1860s, saw the

¹²Rule, p. 329.

establishment of two strong unions, the National Labour Union (NLU) and the Knight of Labour to defend the interests of the American work force. These two trade unions, eventually, came together and formed the American Federation of Labour (AFL) in 1886.¹³ Some seventy years later, AFL merged with another emerging labour organization, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and formed the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) on 9 February 1955. In fact, the CIO had initially emerged as a splinter group from AFL around the 1930s and soon developed as a strong union in America.¹⁴ AFL-CIO was active in establishing international alliances.¹⁵ What makes the American labour unions different from that of Britain is that they were pure labour unions and struggled not to fulfill their political aspirations but rather to meet their corporate interests. Though not to the extent of Europe, there were attempts to politicize the American labor movement. But, the American labour unions have remained predominantly corporatist and result oriented rather than ideologically driven.¹⁶

The development of trade unions in the Western world contributed a lot to the birth of a wage earning class and labour organizations in Africa. Wage labour is believed to have started in Africa just after the advent of colonialism into the region. The creation of a wage labour force in Africa is essentially the product of the establishment of European colonial administration and the flow of capital into the continent. Nevertheless, other forms of labour had been practiced in

¹³John A. Fossum, *Labour Relations: Development, Structure and Process*, Seventh Edition (New York; Boston: Irwin/McGraw-Hill Company LTD, 1999), pp. 25-31.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁵Collin Gonze, "American Labor and Africa," *Africa Today*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1972, pp. 34-35: Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4185231>.

¹⁶William H. Friedland and Dorothy Nelkin, "American Labor: Differences and Policies toward Africa," *Africa Today*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1967, pp. 13-16, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4184740>); Fossum, p. 25.

indigenous societies of Africa for a long time before the arrival of European colonizers.¹⁷ Regardless of providing their labour with little or no wages, African workers had not formed trade unions until the end of the Second World War (WWII). In many African countries, therefore, trade unionism can be said to be a post WWII phenomenon. Before that, African labour was in its embryonic stage, and workers did not have the consciousness to form an organized work force that could undertake collective action against employers. The creation of trade unions among workers who had no coherence among themselves was also very difficult and even unthinkable. Moreover, any attempt to form trade unions had often faced stubborn resistance from both employers and the colonial state.¹⁸

Trade unionism in Africa was first started by the colonial settlers who established their own trade unions around the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the overall socio-economic and political repression carried out by the colonial administrators and employers forced African workers to come together for collective action. And this, eventually, helped them to establish a separate trade union led by their own tribal leaders. In fact, the newly established African trade unions did not have any unique structure; rather they appeared merely as extensions of the trade unions which were formerly established by colonial settlers and professional industrial workers.¹⁹

¹⁷Richard Sand Brook and Robin Cohen, "Introduction," *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1975), p. 13. Charles A. Orr, "Trade Unionism in Colonial Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1966, p. 65. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/159416>.

¹⁸Immanuel Gesis, "Some Remarks on the Development of African Trade Unions," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 3, No. 2, December 1965, pp. 365-367, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41971168>; Roger Scott, "Are Trade Unions Still Necessary in Africa?" *Transition*, No. 33, 1967, p. 27. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2934112>.

¹⁹Gerard Kester, *Trade Unions and Work Place Democracy in Africa* (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), p.107.

In Africa, as elsewhere in the rest of the world, the origin and growth of trade unionism is closely linked to the level of socio-economic and industrial development. Though trade unions began to emerge in Africa in the early twentieth century, African workers took much time to get organized and recognized. The recognition of African workers organization was first started in West Africa and later expanded to North, South, Central and East Africa. Some economic areas which require large manpower played an important role for the birth of trade unions in Africa. For instance, miners, dockers and railway men are among the first to create trade unions in many African countries including Ethiopia.²⁰

During the colonial period, just like the rulers of many African countries, the managers of the industries were all foreigners. As a result, African workers had no room to voice their grievances by petitions and strikes. When they tried to do so the colonial administrators took serious measures against them. Thus, the creation of a strong African trade union was very difficult for African workers before WWII. Yet, the election of tribal leaders to run African trade unions was also against the will of the colonial powers and often created serious problems. Around the end of the 1930s, however, a few colonial governments of the British colonies recognized trade unions in their respective regions. Likewise, several trade unions were established in French colonies during the 1940s and early 1950s.²¹

The Second World War provided a new impetus to the labour relations of Africa by at least introducing modern elements into the society in an unprecedented scale. African veterans of

²⁰Angela Brench, *Trade Unionism in Africa: A Study of its Growth and Orientation* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1967), pp. 10-11; Sidney C. Sufrin, *Unions in Emerging Societies: Frustration and Politics* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1966), pp. 20-21.

²¹Orr, pp. 66-67; Gesis, p. 367; V. L. Allen, "The Study of African Trade Unionism," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1969, pp. 290-291. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1591227-28>.

WWII brought new consciousness back home and began to agitate their fellow countrymen to struggle for their freedom against colonial masters. The nationalist consciousness which was brought by war veterans further stimulated the workers struggle in the industries to establish independent trade unions. In general, the development of African trade unions went hand in hand with the political struggle for independence.²² In fact, the struggle for independence in many African countries could not be completed successfully without the active participation of African workers and their trade unions.²³

As the nationalist movement began to grow after WWII African trade unions also developed concomitantly. In the first stage, trade unions served as vehicles for political expression of the people in the absence of any alternative. They were also used as stages for the growth of national awareness.²⁴ The fight against colonialism and the demand for independence had been pursued by trade unions with great determination in various countries. Strikes had, therefore, been not only used as weapon for nationalist leaders but also as means of creating a feeling of solidarity and an instrument of actions. When trade unions joined the nationalist movement and when the latter resorted to armed conflict to achieve its ultimate goals, trade unions began to serve as the only organized avenue by which the nationalist movement can make its position known.²⁵

During the struggle for independence, trade unions represented the labour wing of the nationalist movements. They played a considerable part in undermining the legitimacy of colonial powers

²²Gesis, pp. 368-369.

²³Hassan Sunmonu, "African Unions in the Struggle for Liberation," *International Union Rights*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2008, p. 5.

²⁴Roger Scott, *The Development of Trade Unionism in Uganda* (Kampala: East African Publishing House, 1966), p. 9.

²⁵Brench, p. 74.

by undertaking strikes, mass demonstrations and boycotts. Not only did they use trade union tactics but also the trade union platform to launch the struggle for independence. Even though workers were politically conscious and struggled for national independence against colonial rule, they rarely took the political initiatives by themselves. Nevertheless, the contribution of trade unions to the liberation of many African countries from the yoke of colonialism was very significant. A number of former African leaders and the founding fathers of the former Organization of African Unity (OAU) had once been active trade unionists. To mention a few of them, Patrice Lumumba of Congo, Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kenneth Kaunda and Frederick Chiluba of Zambia, Hamani Diori of Niger, Modibo Keita of Mali were trade unionists.²⁶

After national independence had been achieved, most African trade unions underwent a radical change in their relation with the state and the political parties. The strong relationship which was formed nearly on an equal footing between trade unions and political parties began to deteriorate after independence. As a result, trade unions were exposed to heavy pressure from political parties and were more or less forced to a position, in which they could only serve as instruments of the governments for increasing productivity, avoiding strikes and restraining the demands of their member workers. In many African countries, trade union-state relations have been backsliding to the kind that trade unions had with colonial rulers. Towards the end of colonial rule, they were recognized and allowed to make a nearly independent union under limited concession with the colonial masters. During the struggle for African liberation, however, they broke the shackles of their colonial masters and joined the political parties as an autonomous

²⁶Sunmanu, p. 5; Gesis, p. 367; Sufrin, p.31.

entity or a fully independent union. After independence, however, the autonomy of trade unions began to be threatened by the newly formed indigenous governments. In many African countries, they were again reduced to non-political instruments of social stability in the interest of the ruling class though some of their members deserted them and controlled the political leadership.²⁷ Thus, political parties began to use trade unions as mere vehicles to express their political objectives to the wider masses. Consequently, African trade unions were forced to remain oscillating between autonomy and political affiliation.²⁸

As elsewhere in Africa, they appeared in Ethiopia around the end of WWII. Trade unions emerged in industries which were run by foreign capitals. The management was also controlled by foreign nationals. Though Ethiopia was not colonized and trade unions were not the direct extensions of colonial settlers' trade unions, they were nonetheless the result of European economic imperialism like that of African countries. Although indigenous self help associations established by workers served as staging grounds for trade unions in Ethiopia, the influence of African and European trade unions cannot be disregarded. Bahru argued that: "...capitalism in Ethiopia grew under the shadow and influence of imperialism."²⁹ While African trade unions developed hand-in-glove with the independence movement, the Ethiopian trade union remained at its infant stage until the 1960s.

²⁷Gesis, p. 375.

²⁸William Freund, "Organized Labor in the Republic of South Africa: History and Democratic Transition," in Jon Kraus (ed.), *Trade Unions and the Coming of Democracy in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.216-217.

²⁹Bahru Zewde, "Economic Origins of the Absolutist State in Ethiopia, 1916-1935," in *Society, State and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008), p. 104.

Statement of the Problem

Trade unionism is a worldwide movement. It is an offshoot of industrialization. As outlined above, the growth of modern industrial organizations involving the use of modern technology and employment of wage workers was followed by the blossoming of trade unions throughout the world. They first evolved in Great Britain around the second half of the eighteenth century, with the expansion of industrialization, and spread to the whole of Europe and North America around the middle of the nineteenth century and later to the rest of the world including Africa. As an individual, an employee was weak when bargaining with employers. The conditions of work and life of workers became so poor that workers had to protect themselves from exploitation through unionization. Thus, trade unions were organized as a result of the continuous associations of wage earners for the purpose of improving their working conditions. In many countries, eventually, they became a powerful force of their respective communities by taking active interest in politics and government activities³⁰

This phenomenon has not only been observed in advanced countries of the world but also in developing countries like Ethiopia. Since Ethiopia has remained predominantly an agrarian state, a well established trade union and an organized trade union movement appeared very late in the country as compared to the rest of the world. Trade unions have been in existence in the country for only half a century and have gone through ups and downs in their endeavor to improve the conditions of work of their members. This was due, in part, to the small size of the country's industrial work force but more importantly because the state viewed any type of organized

³⁰J. Fossum, *Labour Relations* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), p. 32; C.B. Mammoria, *Industrial Labor and Industrial Relation in India*, Vol. I, 1975, p. 127; Frank Burchill, *Labor Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, 2008), p. 2.

protest as a form of insurrection.³¹ Needless to say, most of the industrial workers and civil servants in Ethiopia remained for a long time largely unorganized. However, some workers' associations came into existence, usually, with the thought of securing a better bargaining position regarding wages and benefits in their relations with employers. Thus, they remained weak organizations struggling to attain prestige and status. The absence of legal recognition of trade unions for a long time enabled the employers to become hostile to workers' attempts to organize. As a result, trade unions' efforts to defend their right generally ended up in failure until their struggle helped them to achieve recognition when the government promulgated the labour relations decree for the first time in the history of the country on 5 September 1962.³²

The relation between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia has been characterized by lingering disagreements. For instance, the state often considered trade unions' demands for better wages and other benefits as illegitimate questions. The role of the state in Ethiopian industrial relations went beyond drafting appropriate labour policies and laws. This has seriously affected the tripartite relations in all industrial enterprises of the country. For many years, the state has, for instance, taken the role of employers in the tripartite relations with trade unions. Indeed, the tripartite relation was mainly a bilateral one just between trade unions and the state. This was clearly observed during the military regime when the employers' federation was dissolved and its role was taken over by the management bodies of state agencies. Therefore, these enduring features of industrial relations of the country are the focus of this research.

³¹Ajitu Megersa, "The History of Ethiopian Working Class Struggle and its Aftermath," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of Political Science and International Relations, 1984, pp 15-16.

³²Desta Alemu, "The Ethiopian Trade Union Movement Pre and Post Ethiopian Revolution," In An. A. Gromyko (ed.) *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of the Ethiopian Studies, Vol. I*. Moscow: Nauka Publisher, 1988, p. 137.

The study aims mainly at reconstructing the history of the intricate relations between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia. It deals mainly with the history of the relation between the national confederation and the Imperial and *Därg* regimes. Among others, it seeks to answer the following questions: what major changes and continuities were observed in the relation between trade unions and the state for about half a century? What were the major impediments that hindered the national confederation to be independent? How did state policies and labour movements influence the socio-economic developments of the country in general and trade union-state relations in particular? And what were the major development areas on which trade unions and the state worked together?

Literature Review

In Africa, the study of labour in general and labour history in particular is still in its infancy. Even though African labour played an important part in the growth and development of the world economy, it has not yet been given due emphasis in the scholarly literature as compared to the Western world. However, some comprehensive works on the various issues of labour including the history of the relation between trade unions and the state have been written by both expatriates and African scholars. Among African scholars, Nigerians, Ghanaians, South Africans and Kenyans have made good progress in labour studies. In particular, South Africa, with its rich and troubled history of organized trade unions, has seen extensive studies on labour in general and on the history of trade unions and the state in particular.³³

³³Bill Freud, "Labor and Labor History in Africa: A Review of the Literature," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1984, pp. 1-2. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/524115>.

In many African countries, the study of labour has been dominated by economists, sociologists and labour and industrial relation professionals. Nevertheless, historians have also studied the history of African workers in relation to slavery and slave trade, colonialism and its adverse exploitation, the anti-colonial movement and post-colonial developments. The history of trade unions and the state is discussed mainly in literature which deals with the post independence labour conditions in Africa. Once African countries gained their independence, trade unions were plunged into power rivalry. One of the rivalries which broke out in postcolonial African countries was between the political party which controlled state power and the trade unions which had contributed a lot to the liberation of Africa and aspired for strong position after independence. However, African states failed to work with their one time partners, the trade unions; rather they engaged in repressive activities against any organized movement. It is this crisis of labour movements after independence that has been emphasized in the scholarly literature. More importantly, the antagonistic attitudes of the newly emerging states against trade unions and the subsequent struggle between the two have received considerable scholarly attention.

The antagonistic relationship between trade unions and the state in post colonial Africa has been covered in the literature. The works of Jimi O. Adesina and T.M. Yesufu, Ukandi Damachi, R. B. Davison, David Hemson, Jason Hickel, J. Douglas Muir and John L. Brown are a few instances worth mentioning in this regard. The two Ibadan scholars, Adesina and Yesufu, clearly addressed the antagonistic relationship between trade unions and the state in post colonial Nigeria. They argued that workers organizations contributed a lot not only to the independence of Nigeria but also to its political developments thereafter. They, however, regretted that the sustained organizational capacity of trade unions to challenge the state remained futile. They

further noted that politics affected the solidarity of the country's trade union movement at both the national and international level. And they were reduced merely to serving the state.³⁴

Likewise, Damachi analyzes the tripartite relations among trade unions, employers and the different regimes in post colonial Ghana. He concluded that the post-independence regimes were repressive towards trade unions. He further noted that the rulers of independent Ghana repeated the colonial control practices upon trade unions.³⁵ Davison also noted that so long as the state continued as the dominant employer of labour and the principal source of capital in postcolonial Ghana, establishing an effective and free trade union movement would be difficult. The state has always conspired against trade unions and repressed any form of organized movement.³⁶

Heckle and Hemson also noted that the government of post-Apartheid South Africa played an increasingly repressive role as it tried to contain labour's growing involvement in political issues. The relation between the African National Congress (ANC) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) could not continue as it was during the periods of anti-Apartheid struggle. They further noted that though COSATU was trying to keep its independence, the state intervention was always there.³⁷

³⁴Jimi O. Adesina, *Labour in the Exploitation of an African Crisis : A Critique of Current Orthodoxy: The Case of Nigeria* (Oxford: CODESRIA, 1994), pp. 81-82; T.M. Yesufu, *An Introduction to Industrial Relations in Nigeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 146-147.

³⁵Ukandi G. Damachi, *The Role of Trade Unions in the Development Process, With a Case Study of Ghana* (New York: Palgrave, 1974), pp. 88-89.

³⁶R. B. Davison, "Labour Relations in Ghana," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 310, 1957, p. 134. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1030655>.

³⁷Jason Hickel, "Subaltern Consciousness in South Africa's Labour Movement: 'Workerism' in the KwaZulu-Natal Sugar Industry," *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 64, No.3, 2012, p.1 DOI: 10.1080/02582473.2012.661756; David Hemson, "Liberation and Working Class Struggles in South Africa," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 9, 1977, pp. 81-82.

Muir and Brown also argued that many postcolonial African states including Kenya considered a strong trade union as a dangerous element for their development. Thus, they put severe restrictions on the processes of unionization. After Kenya became independent a number of trade unions were deregistered and harsh measures were taken against the process of unionization. Even though the government of Kenyatta gradually introduced some reforms ensuring freedom of association the relationship between trade unions and the state remained very rough.³⁸ In general, therefore, the literature on African labour has focused on the antagonistic relationship between trade unions and the African states, and ignoring the mutual engagements of the two to enhance the socio-economic and political developments of the respective African countries.

As in many African countries, in Ethiopia, the various issues of labour in general and the history of labour relations or industrial relations in particular have not yet been given due attention by historians. So far there is no comprehensive scholarly work on the history of the relation between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia. It is even possible to say that the history of trade unions and trade unionism in Ethiopia has been hardly touched by historians. Nevertheless, given the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, there are some works written both by undergraduate and a few graduate students of the departments of Law, Political Science and International Relations, Economics and Public Administration. Although they did not strictly follow historical methodology and are not comprehensive enough to show the changes and continuities in the relations between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia, they are indispensable to push this study forward.

³⁸J. Douglas Muir and John L. Brown, "Trade Union Power and the Process of Economic Development: The Kenyan Example," *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 1974, pp. 479-480. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23070895>.

Though very few, undergraduate and graduate students of the Department of History have also attempted to study the genesis and development of trade unions during the imperial period, local trade union movements and the history of some industrial firms in the country. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all aspects of the industrial relations in general and the history of the relation between trade unions and the state in particular have been adequately studied. In other words, there is a considerable gap that has to be filled from a historical perspective.

In the earlier research works of different scholars, the full picture of the genesis and developments of trade unions and its socio-economic and political role in the country have not been properly addressed. More significantly, the dynamics of the relation between trade unions and the state in the period between 1946 and 1991 have not yet received appropriate attention. Among the scholarly works conducted on the political economy of the country in general and labor relations and trade unions in particular, the more important ones are reviewed hereunder.

These works can be fairly categorized into four groups. The first group consists of those works which focus on the factors that affected a particular industrial enterprise or the total industrialization process in the country. Nevertheless, the issue of trade unions is left out of the scope of all these studies. Among others, the works of Shiferaw Bekele, Eshetu Chole, Duri Muhammed, Kassu Tumiso and Shumet Admas are very relevant in this category. What is common among these works is that they assess the development of a particular industry or the overall industrialization process in Ethiopia but leave out the issue of industrial relations. Shiferaw has, for instance, documented well the intriguing and very tense political situations between Emperor Menilek II and two railway line construction companies, *Compagnie Imperiale des Chemins de Fers Ethiopiens* and *Compagnie Imperiale des Chemins de Fer Franco-*

Ethiopien de Djibouti a Addis Abeba over the construction process of the railway line, the first industrial enterprise in the country. What has not been investigated by the writer, however, was the question of workers and their organization, presumably because labour and industrial relations were beyond the scope of his study.³⁹ Eshetu and Duri argued that the post Ethio-Italian war period witnessed the beginning of significant industrialization process in Ethiopia. They further indicated that industrial development in Ethiopia was still very much in its infancy and its contribution to the gross domestic product and the country's employment relation was less than ten percent.⁴⁰ But, they do not deal with the dynamics of industrial relations in the already established industries. Kassu and Shumet have also studied in detail the history of Arbaminch and Aqaqi textile factories respectively. Even though both students made an attempt to incorporate the problems that factory workers faced during production decline, they failed to mention the role of trade unions in forging workers and developing their bargaining power in the respective factories. The role of state functionaries in resolving industrial problems was not also given appropriate attention.⁴¹

The works of Getachew Taddesse, Efrem Amare, Mesfin Getahun, Alemseged Baldados, Solomon Tasisa and Yamlaksira Shewan Gizaw are grouped under the second category which describes the relationship among employees, employers and the state in a particular service or manufacturing industry in Ethiopia. These studies deal with trade unionism and trade union

³⁹Shiferaw Bekele, "The Railway, Trade and Politics: A Historical Survey, 1896-1935," MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 1982, p. 154.

⁴⁰Duri Muhammed, "Industrialization and Income Distribution in Ethiopia," In Riveyemamu and J.F. (ed.) *Industrialization and Income Distribution in Africa* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1980), p. 16; Eshetu Chole, "Constraints to Industrial Development in Ethiopia," In An. A. Gromyko (ed) *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of the Ethiopian Studies, Vol. I*. Moscow: Nauka Publisher, 1988, p. 151.

⁴¹Shumet Admas, "A History of Akaki Mills to 1974," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 1986, p. 25; Kassu Tumiso. "A History of Arbaminch Textile Factory from Foundation to 2006," MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 2009, p. 54.

movements at a particular industry level rather than exploring the national context. In fact, each trade union and trade union movement was mentioned as part of the nationally organized trade union by these scholars. Moreover, they gave much emphasis only to the organizational structure and problems of the respective trade unions.⁴²

For instance, Yamlaksira's MA thesis and the BA theses of Getachew and Alemseged focus on workers' unions of private higher education institutions, Ethiopian Airline Workers' Union and Workers' Union of Ethiopian Insurance Companies respectively. These studies assessed the major hurdles that the instructors of higher education institutions, the workers of the Ethiopian airlines and insurance companies had faced when they formed unions. The writers argued that the absence of a comprehensive labour law and lack of awareness among the workers about the role of trade unions were impediments to the development of trade unionism in Ethiopia.⁴³ On the other hand, the BA theses of Mesfin, Efrem and Solomon deal with workers' union in the Ethiopian marble industry, Metehara and Wonji sugar industries respectively. They gave much emphasis to industrial developments and labour organizations inside each industry. However, they ignored trade union–state relationship in the respective industries.⁴⁴

⁴²Getachew Taddesse, "The Politics of Labor Movement in Ethiopian Air Lines Labor Union," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of Political Science and International Relations, 1973, 6; Efrem Amare, "The History of Metehara Sugar Factory from its Foundation to 1974," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 1989, p. 22; Mesfin Getahun, "The History of Ethiopian Marble Industry, 1937-1984," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 1989, 25; Alemseged Baldados, "A History of the Labor Union of Ethiopian Insurance Corporation," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 2000, p. 3; Solomon Tasisa, "The Labour Organization of Wonji Sugar Workers," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of Sociology, 1980, 10; Yamlaksira Shewangizaw, "Hurdles against Setting up Trade Unions: A Case of Selected Private Higher Educational Institutions," MBA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of Management, 1999, p. 1.

⁴³Getachew, p. 6; Alemseged, p. 3; Yamlaksira, p. 21.

⁴⁴Solomon, p. 10; Efrem, p. 22; Mesfin, p. 25.

The third group of studies deals with the labour legislations and policies introduced and implemented by the imperial and military regimes to strengthen industrial relations and to guarantee the formation of trade unions in the country. The works of Lynn G. Morehous, R. Stutz, Seyum Gebre Egziabher and Tefera Haile Selassie are very relevant in this regard. These scholars argued that labour remained unrecognized for a long period of time by the legislative body of the country. They further indicated that it was Article 47 of the Revised Constitution of 1955 that recognized Ethiopians' right to engage in any occupation and to form and join associations for the first time in the history of Ethiopia. This recognition was, however, later strengthened by the introduction of the civil code of 1960 and the labour relations decree of 1962.⁴⁵ In fact, Seyum has traced back the recognition of industrial relations by the legislative body to 1944. He argued that Article III of the factories proclamation of 1944 set up a factory's board which was responsible for the establishment of appropriate conditions of work such as hours of work and place of work for employees.⁴⁶ However, the proclamation did not mention workers' wage and their right to form association; rather it was more about social welfare.

On the other hand, Morehous and Stutz argued that the labour relation decree of 1962 has brought a significant change in the nature of industrial relations in Ethiopia. They further stated that though this proclamation gave juridical recognition to trade unions, it restricted their role in political matters.⁴⁷ It was, however, after this decree that CELU was instituted on 9 April 1963 and affiliated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), among others.

⁴⁵Lynn G. Morehous, "Ethiopian Labor Relations: Attitudes, Practice and Law," *Journal of Ethiopian Law*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1969, pp. 45-46; R. Stutz, "The Developing Industrial Relation System in Ethiopia," A Teaching Material, Addis Ababa University: Department of Economics, 1967, pp. 64-65; Tefera Haile Selassie, "Yä Industry ena Yä Mängest Säratañoč Astädadär Edegät," in Shiferaw Bekele (ed.) *Kä Dehenät Wodä Lemat:Eweqäten Lätewuled Mastäläläf* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2006), pp. 83-90.

⁴⁶Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions Concerned with Labor Relations in Ethiopia," A Teaching Material, Haile Selassie I University: Department of Public Administration, 1969, p. 12.

⁴⁷Morehous, p. 15; Stutz, p. 65.

Despite tracing the genesis of labour law in the country, the scholars said nothing about the procrastination of the state in introducing comprehensive policies and laws on labour and related issues.

Likewise, Tefera Haile Selassie argued that the labour relation in Ethiopia until the 1960s was much similar with the period of slavery. It was characterized by a master-servant style relation. He further noted that the growth of labour relations in the country has been lethargic as compared to the labour relations in the newly independent African countries. However, as an insider and a government functionary who was appointed to a high post in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in the period understudy, he didn't clearly explain why Ethiopia lagged behind African countries in labour relations. The author devoted much of his analysis to showing how the imperial regime strove to make the foundational work or to establish a platform for labour institution in the country.⁴⁸

The fourth group of studies has attempted to assess the nature of industrial relations in general and trade unions in particular at the national context. Even though their analysis is quite different, their scope of study is the same; they have all attempted to cover the nature of industrial relations right from the establishment of the national labour confederation in the country to the beginning of the military regime. The works of Beyene Solomon, Tewodros Seyum, Desta Alemu, Ajitu Megeresa, Kiflu Mekuria and Gideon Mengesha are good examples of this group.

⁴⁸Tefera Haile Selassie, "Yä Industry ena Yä Māngest Säratāñoč Astādadār Edegāt," in Shiferaw Bekele (ed.) *Kä Dehenāt Wodä Lemat ...*, pp. 101-102.

Beyene's works are memoirs. The first book, *Fighter for Democracy: The Saga of an Ethiopian Labour Leader*, is written in English and comprises about twenty eight interconnected themes. In his book, the author describes his life history and his role as a leader of CELU. In doing so, however, Beyene narrates only the overall activities of CELU in the period between 1962 and 1974. He says little about the confederation after 1974. The second book, *Yä Ityopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät*, is written in Amharic. But, it seems to be a mere translation of some of the themes of the first book though some illustrations are added. In both books, Beyene describes CELU's organizational structure, foreign relations and the role it played during workers' strikes from its establishment to the beginning of the military regime. In his analysis, Beyene gave much emphasis to the contribution that CELU made to the workers of the country. Moreover, the author exposes only the shortcomings of the state while remaining silent about the shortcomings of CELU's leadership. Beyene describes how the leadership worked to strengthen the Confederation and overlooked the role of the majority of member workers. He ascribed the weakness of CELU, as compared to other trade unions in Africa, to the small size of the workforce, the poor educational background of members, and the predominant agrarian economy of the country.⁴⁹

Tewodros's MA thesis, "A Short History of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU), 1962-1975" is another work on the subject. In his thesis, the author deals with the genesis of CELU, its overall activities and the role that it had played in the Ethiopian revolution. Despite the numerous appendices that he has attached to his thesis, Tewodros depended heavily on secondary sources, especially, on Beyene's Amharic book. To his credit, however, he

⁴⁹Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of an Ethiopian Labor Leader* (Baltimore: Publish America, LLP, 2010), p. 87; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Ityopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 E.C/2012), p. 72.

interviewed Abraham Makonnen and Beyene Solomon, the first two leaders of CELU, to verify and complement secondary sources.

Desta's article "The Ethiopian Trade Union Movement Pre and Post Ethiopian Revolution" is also another relevant work to understand the Ethiopian trade union movement from its inception to the end of the military regime. Nevertheless, Desta attributed the successive failure of Ethiopian workers to undertake a general strike nationwide only to the conspiracy of the Ethiopian government rather than the docile and subservient nature of trade union leaders and the weakness of the organizational structure of CELU.⁵⁰ True, as has been described by various scholars, the intervention of the state in the overall activities of trade unions was quite evident since the emergence of organized workers in the country. Moreover, the article overlooked the positive relationship which was established between trade unions and the state for mutual benefit.

The BA theses of Kiflu, Gideon and Ajitu share a common belief that trade unions are forces for democracy representing the interest of the working class and their legality implies the democratization of the social, economic and political institutions of the society. Even though the work of Kiflu is from a historical perspective and the works of Ajitu and Gideon are from a political science and international relations point of view, they all argued that trade unionism and trade union movements are clear manifestations of an advanced and higher stage of socio-economic formation of a given country that can only be attained with the coming of capitalism and its socialized production. These works are written virtually based on oral information which

⁵⁰Desta Alemu, pp. 140-141.

was collected from participants of trade union movements and trade union leaders.⁵¹ Nevertheless, these studies attributed the birth of trade unions and the beginning of trade union movements in Ethiopia to the influence of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the neighboring African country's trade unions, disregarding its indigenous character.

The thesis of Thomas C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State in the Ethiopian Region, 1919-1974" is one of the most important scholarly works on the subject. The author assesses the dynamics of capital, workers and the state in the Ethiopian region right from the commencement of railway transport from Djibouti to Addis Ababa to the demise of the imperial regime. He gave due emphasis to those trade unions that emerged along the Franco-Ethiopian railway line, such as the dock and maritime workers' union in the port of Djibouti, French workers' organization, Somali and Yemeni workers' organization and Ethiopian workers' union. Moreover, due attention has also been given to workers' organizations in Eritrea. Killion argued that the aforementioned trade unions were established in the Ethiopian region as a result of the influx of European capital. He further noted that they were influenced by the ethnic and national consciousness of the respective people. Nevertheless, the author failed to look at CELU as a national confederation and also attributed the formation of workers' organization in Ethiopia only to the influx of European capital into the region. The scope of his study is also limited to the imperial period.⁵²

⁵¹Kiflu Mekuria, "The History of Growth of Labor Unions in Ethiopia," BA Thesis, Haile Selassie I University: Department of History, 1973, p. 3; Ajitu, p. 5; Gideon Mengesha, "The Labour Movement in Ethiopia," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department Political Science and International Relations, 1988, p. 6.

⁵²Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State in the Ethiopian Region, 1919-1974," PhD Dissertation, University of Stanford: Department of History, 1985, pp. 172-175.

In general, the dominant issue which is given due emphasis in much of the literature is the antagonistic relationship between the state and trade unions which has existed since the 1940s. Issues like collaboration between trade unions and the state for mutual benefit is left unmentioned, probably because trade unions have continued to express their grievances against the government until the downfall of the military regime and thereafter. For instance, some scholars stood in favor of the cause of the workers and their unions and demonized the state as hostile to their right. They argued that it was the state that abused the industrial relations in the country and prevented workers from striking. For instance, the works of Beyene and Desta are very much in this vein.⁵³ Beyene, for instance, argued that from the establishment of CELU the political atmosphere in the country was very tense and the national security and the Imperial Body Guard were intimidating and hindering all its undertakings.⁵⁴ He further indicated that even after Emperor Haile Selassie I issued the labor relations decree on 5 September 1962, some members of CELU were arrested and others were physically intimidated. Consequently, he added that CELU failed to conduct a successful general strike though it called a strike by member workers several times.⁵⁵ He further asserted that even though the military regime issued Labor Proclamation No. 64/1975 on 6 December 1975 that would transform the structure of CELU into a socialist oriented one, it continued to intimidate trade unions' leaders whenever they intended to organize a strike.⁵⁶ In his analysis of the Ethiopian industrial relations, however, Beyene did not explain why both the imperial and the military regimes stood against trade unions.

⁵³Beyene, *Fighters for...*, p. 67; Desta, pp. 136-137.

⁵⁴Beyene, *Fighters for...*, pp. 66-67.

⁵⁵*Ibid*, p. 72.

⁵⁶*Ibid*, p. 166.

Likewise, Desta argued that though Ethiopia became a member of ILO in 1923, trade unions had remained unrecognized until 1962 because of lack of interest on the side of the imperial regime.⁵⁷ He further indicated that even after the approval of the first labour relation decree, the imperial government, taking advantage of its ties with the capitalist countries, invited foreign specialists to assimilate industrial knowhow and their workers aspirations in order to fit the ruling circles and consolidate their own economic and political position in the country. Moreover, the proclamation restricted the leaders of trade unions from any involvement in political activities.⁵⁸ He added that even though the military regime issued a separate proclamation for trade unions which is referred to as Trade Unions Proclamation No. 222 of 1982, they remained under strict supervision of one of the government agencies, the Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE). As a result, the leaders of trade unions remained under continuous fear of arrest or intimidation by the state and failed to undertake a general strike in the country.⁵⁹

On the other hand, some scholars argued that it was the deviant political ideologies of trade unions and their leaders that forced the government to work against them. Among others, Andargachew Tiruneh, John Markakis and Nega Ayele argued that trade unions had virtually anti government political stand like opposition groups or parties.⁶⁰ Andargachew further indicated that at the beginning, the trade unions had been corporatist in character but after some decades they became more and more political and this strengthened the interventions and

⁵⁷Desta, p. 136.

⁵⁸*Ibid*, pp. 137-138.

⁵⁹*Ibid*, pp.140-141.

⁶⁰Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 23; John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Shama Books Plc, 2006), p. 111.

reprisals of the government against them.⁶¹ Similarly, Markakis and Nega argued that trade unions were considered as opponents of the government because they staged strikes not only for industrial demands but also supporting some political agenda.⁶² They further indicated that trade unions, for instance, opposed the proposed education reform /Sector Review/ in support of the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) and the unequal distribution of land in the country supporting peasants in 1974.⁶³ Both scholars treated trade unions as opponents of the government or supporter of opposition groups rather than considering them as positive democratic forces for the all round development of the nation.

Thus, most of the sources reviewed so far are characterized by narrowness of focus and limitation of scope. They all emphasize the antagonistic relationship that existed between trade unions and the state in industrial enterprises during the imperial period though some of them, of course, assessed the military regime as well. This study, therefore, seeks to continue this important line of investigation and offers an alternative that combines elements of all forms of relationships including the antagonistic one that existed between trade unions and the state. Moreover, the study will explore areas of collaboration between trade unions and the state and how this in turn contributed to industrial development in the country and to bring peace among major actors in industrial enterprises. It aims also to examine and analyze the following themes: the antecedents of trade unions in Ethiopia, the similarities and differences in labour policies of the different regimes, changes and continuities in the national confederation, the responses of the state to trade union movements and the role of trade unions and the state in educating the industrial labour force of the country.

⁶¹ Andargachew, p. 28.

⁶² Markakis and Nega, pp. 111-112.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 112.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Trade unionism arises with industrialization. Nevertheless, it does not mean that it could not appear in developing countries with low level of industrialization. Labour institutions which deal with wage, working hour and conditions of working place were established both in developed and developing countries at different times. Nevertheless, the way trade unions were operating and the ideology that drove them varied from country to country in accordance with their level of socio-economic and political development. Likewise, the relation between trade unions and the state has grown in line with the overall development of the respective countries. Yet, the ideology of the state and the state–capital alliance often influenced the relation between trade unions and the state. Thus, this study argues that the conceptual framework used to analyze the history of the relation between trade unions and the state in developing countries should be different from that of developed countries.⁶⁴

Ethiopia is one of the developing countries in the world. Since the country has been still at the early capitalist stage of development one can witness the dominance of strong state-capital alliance which in turn affects the relation between trade unions and the state. Trade unionism in Ethiopia has had a precarious existence since the emergence of an organized labour movement in the country around the early 1940s. Trade unions have particularly faced several challenges being the target of succeeding governments, political factions, employers and unfavorable economic policies. Worse still, they have been characterized by weak organizational structures and often lack of unity.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Sufrin, pp. 33-34.

⁶⁵Markakis and Nega, p. 60.

Since the main purpose of this study is to examine the history of the relationship between trade union and the state in Ethiopia the central organizing concepts are ‘labour control and labour resistance’.⁶⁶ They are employed as major concepts to describe and analyze the changing pattern of trade unions-state relationship. The study argues that in developing countries or in countries which are at the stage of early capitalism the state is always attached with capital and stands against labour. Labour control is used to refer to the activities of the owner and collaborators of capital including the state which are designed to assert authority over wage labour and control the workers and their organization. On the other hand, labour resistance is used to denote those activities of the workers and collaborators of wage labour which are conducted to obstruct the domination of capital and the state and assert the autonomy of workers’ organization.⁶⁷

In emerging capitalist economies like Ethiopia, the state has always been linked with capital so as to enhance investment, and surplus production by minimizing wage and controlling workers’ resistance. Consequently, the relationship between trade unions and the state has become antagonistic. On the other hand, workers and their organizations have struggled to obstruct the intervention of the state and assert their autonomy. John Markakis and Nega Ayele argued that the strong bond established between the imperial regime and foreign capital to enhance investment and surplus production by controlling wage labour provoked militant action on the part of the workers. They further explained that “... constant and forceful intervention of the state on behalf of capital provided a clear demonstration of the link between these two, and promoted the rapid development of political consciousness among the Ethiopian proletariat.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶Jeff Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class: Ghanaian Miners Struggle, 1870-1980* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1984), p. 1.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, pp.1-2.

⁶⁸Markakis and Nega, p. 60.

Bahru also argued that the collaboration between the state and capital helped the latter to get admiration for its role in transforming the environment at the expense and misery of workers.⁶⁹ Likewise, Killion argued that unlike the strong relationship that has existed between workers and capital in developed labour relations because of the unique pattern of capitalist development in Ethiopia, the state has always taken the role of capital and established relation with the workers. Consequently, this created resistance on the part of workers and repression by the state. He further noted that during the imperial period "...a virtual state-capital alliance had developed between the imperial class and foreign capital."⁷⁰ Kiflu Tadesse also used the two concepts to describe the participation of workers and their organization in the 1974 revolution. He argued that the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU) showed their resistance to the state to form an independent organization and to get promulgated a new progressive labour code⁷¹

Nevertheless, with the coming to power of the military regime after the 1974 revolution, a new labour relation with the socialist model was developed. In this model, the state fully controlled capital and became sympathizer of workers. Thus, an alternative conceptual framework, the 'Marxist Labour Relation Approach' is also used to guide the relationship between the All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU) and the military regime. This approach recognizes the existence of an inherent conflict in labour relations. It also argues that the conflict in the industry is just the reflection of class conflicts which pervades the whole of the society.⁷²

⁶⁹Bahru Zewde, "Environment and Capital: Notes for a History of the Wonji-Shoa Sugar Estate, 1951-1974," in *Society, State and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008), pp, 120-221.

⁷⁰Killion, p.10.

⁷¹Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation Part II, Ethiopia: Transformation and Conflict, The History of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party* (New York: University Press of America Inc, 1998), pp. 18-19.

⁷²S.Deery and D. Plowman, *Australian Industrial Relations* (Sydney: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1985), p.12.

Marxists see labour relations as an element in the totality of social relations of production. The Marxist approach argues that conflict in labour relations is not just an industrial problem; rather it emanates from class struggle. Marxists believe that in the capitalist economy there is always an imbalance of power between the owner of the means of production and the work force both within and outside industries. They further note that the struggle of workers under their trade unions is vital to bring the imbalance of power in the industries to equilibrium. According to this approach, the role of the state is developing institutionalized mechanisms for controlling conflicts between classes both within and outside the industries and achieving social stability.⁷³

Thus, these approaches will be helpful to analyze the major problems which could affect the tripartite relation in industrial enterprises and drove workers to strike. However, this thesis also tries to show that there has not been only antagonistic relation between states and trade unions rather there were also issues on which they worked for mutual benefits.

Methodology and Sources

The investigation focuses on the history of the intricate relation between the national labour confederation and the state in the period between 1946 and 1991. Exploring the changes and continuities in the relation between the national confederation and the two successive regimes which controlled power in the period under study is the major focus of this study. It also assesses how the changes and continuities were sustained during the transitional period of the incumbent regime as an epilogue. Moreover, due emphasis is also given to individual unions when labour

⁷³Frank, p. 5; Deery and Plowman, 11; Michael Salamon, *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice*, 4th edition. (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000), p. 9.

movements and strikes are discussed. Even though industrial relation is all about the relationship among the three stakeholders, i.e workers and their unions, employers and their federation and the state, this study does not give much emphasis to the employers' federation. Since, particularly during the military regime, almost all industrial enterprises were under government control and employers were government appointees, the role of employers' federation has been virtually taken by the state agencies and it is insignificant for this study. But, some major points will be seen in the discussion of tripartite relations. With regard to the state, this study will focus on the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) and the Labour Board which played an important role in the labour relations of the country. Moreover, it analyzes the political economy of labour and labour policies of the state which, of course, differed from regime to regime, and also influenced the labour situation of the country differently.

The sources used in this study are mainly collected from the archives of several institutions, government agencies, industries and libraries. I collected archives from these organizations for a year and half from July 2014 to December 2015. Some organizations are worth mentioning in this regard. The various collections which are available in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) are very significant for this study. Among the various collections, the *Ethiopian Herald*, *Addis Zāmān*, the *Voice of Labour*, and several other magazines and bulletins provide important details about the history of the relation between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia. The clandestine papers of the leftist political parties such as *Democracia*, *Abyot*, *Labader* and *Yāsāfiw Hezeb Demṣ* and others are also important primary sources to understand the role of trade unions during the 1974 revolution. The other important sources which are available in IES are microfilms brought from British Foreign Office. They are very useful to understand the early developments of Ethiopian labour movements in relation with the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers'

movement. Due mainly to the efforts of Sven Rubenson, microfilms are brought from British Foreign Office and are made available in the IES. In general, the researcher has benefited a lot from the potential of these primary sources.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) was also one of the most important institutions from which I collected pertinent archives from September to November 2014. Several archives related to Labour Board, tripartite relations and correspondences between MoLSA and the national labour confederation are deposited in its archive. Though the archives were kept haphazardly and made the search for pertinent sources a herculean task, the researcher benefited much from it.

The research also draws on primary sources deposited in the archive and library of the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU). I photographed a lot of archives from it. I also photocopied several unpublished sources and a number of volumes of the confederation's news paper, the *Voice of Labour* from the library. The national confederation's correspondences with local union leaders, the Labor Board, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the security apparatus are valuable primary sources collected from CETU's archive.

Attempts have also been made to gather archives from the defunct Franco-Ethiopian Railway Company both at Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa Textile, Factory, Baher Dar Textile Factory, Dire Dawa Cement Factory, Ethiopian Fiber Factory, Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory, *Anbässa* Transport Company and Aqaqi Textile Factory. Nevertheless, I was not able to find pertinent documents from the aforementioned industrial firms. For instance, the documents of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Company at Dire Dawa had been put between the roof and the ceiling

in the administrative building and virtually changed into dust because of high temperature. The documents which were found in Addis Ababa had been put underground and destroyed because of runoff. Like wise, most of the documents of the Wonji- Šäwa Sugar factory were destroyed because of runoff from the Awash River. The archives of a number of other factories were taken by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Board of Trustee for Public Enterprises when they were privatized. The Board collected only selected documents and put them under strict control. Though I could not get pertinent sources to my research, the archives of Baher Dar Textile were easily accessible and well kept.

Yet, attempts have also been made to access unpublished private diaries and memoirs written by workers and trade union leaders. Among others, I benefited a lot from the collections of Abreham Mäkonän and Abära Abäbä. Since they were the major actors in the labour relations, the personal records of such personalities contributed a lot to this dissertation. Nevertheless, the search for these memoirs to supplement the published sources was the hardest task for the researcher.

Thirdly, attempts have been made to use oral sources and fill the gap left by archival sources. Oral sources can serve not only as sources by themselves but also as eyewitness accounts to countercheck the information obtained from secondary and archival sources. Thus, extensive fieldwork was conducted among the major institutions and industries located both inside and outside the capital. This helped the researcher to gather data from leaders of trade unions and the management bodies as well as workers. The interview was conducted by selecting very knowledgeable individuals who were active participants in the events under study, mainly labour leaders. But, since most of the top leaders of the organizations were residing abroad, I faced a

serious problem to find them in person. Consequently, I was forced to interview some of them through phone calls. This hindered me to interview as many top labour leaders as possible. Regardless, I tried to get pertinent information by using every available medium of communication.

CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF ETHIOPIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT, 1946-1962

This chapter broadly discusses the early development of the Ethiopian labour movement and the response of the state [government] to this unfolding phenomenon in the period between 1946 and 1962. The early development of Ethiopian labour movement clearly falls into three stages. In the first stage, Ethiopian labourers in different industrial enterprises established self-help associations to help member workers who were made redundant for various reasons. Sometimes, leaders of the associations tried to mediate between the workers and the employers peacefully. They also expressed their views concerning the situations of their member workers in different forms. The associations not only served as a medium to help one another but they were also used as important platforms to discuss their day to day experiences in the industry. It also helped member workers to develop intimate relations among themselves and overcome homesickness as most of them came from different areas living their relatives behind. In the second stage, workers in the associations and outside began to develop class consciousness and began to struggle to promote their class interests. They combined economic demands with nationalist consciousness against foreign employers and the state. The self-help associations were soon changed into covert trade unions. In the third stage, factory level covert trade unions joined together to form cooperatives and employ laid off and injured workers. This snowballed into a strong labour movement and resulted in the establishment of the Ethiopian Labour Unions

(ELU), the first of its kind in the history of Ethiopia, and a precursor of the later Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU).

This chapter mainly addresses the antecedents to the Ethiopian labour movement and how issues of labour came to be incorporated into policies of the state. It also surveys how wage labour was started in Ethiopia before the advent of capitalism to the country. How was foreign capital penetration into Ethiopia welcomed by the state? How did the existing feudal political economy provide space for capitalism to flourish in Ethiopia? To what extent did foreign capital penetration hasten the proletarianization of peasants in the country? How did the "peasant proletarians" develop their class consciousness and come to be categorized as a working class? How were the enterprise based self-help associations transformed into covert trade unions? What kinds of measures were taken by the state to deal with problems of labour relations? These are among the wide range of questions that this chapter tries to address.

1.1 Antecedents to Workers' Organization in Ethiopia

1.1.1. The Evolution of Wage Labour in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is an ancient and independent country in Africa.¹ It has a rich heritage. However, it is a predominantly agrarian society.² True, labour is one of the most important factors of production even in agrarian economic relations, but since it is beyond the scope of this study, it will not be discussed in any detail. On the other hand, Ethiopia has had a very long history of handicraft

¹Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991, Second Edition*, (Oxford: James Currey: Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002), p. 1.

²Desta Alemu, "The Ethiopian Trade Union Movement Pre and Post Ethiopian Revolution," In An. A. Gromyko (ed.) *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of the Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. I (Moscow: Nauka Publisher, 1988), p. 135.

production.³ Nonetheless, despite the use of spectacular designs produced by handicraft workers on the coins and relics of the Aksumite civilization and on the rock hewn churches of Lalibäla which are clear evidence of the existence of skilled labourers, we find no mention of wage labour and wage earning class or any labour organizations that could be compared to our present workers' organizations or trade unions. Presumably, the very substantial part of the production then was undertaken either by slave or forced labour not by wage labour.⁴ Alongside tribute, surplus labour was used as one of the economic bases of political power before the twentieth century. It was apparently extracted in the form of either chattel slavery or forced labour.⁵ Hence, providing labour service for a wage or in Amharic *dämwäz*⁶ [literally, the sweat of blood] is a very recent phenomenon in Ethiopia history.

Needless to say, wage labour scarcely existed in traditional Ethiopia because slaves were often chosen for work instead of hired labourers. Traditional Ethiopians preferred slaves to hired servants because they considered the former as more industrious and dependable than the latter until the early twentieth century. In fact, the absence of monetary economy also seriously hindered the growth of wage labour in the country. Consequently, human labour had been exploited mercilessly without any payment until the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷

³Eshetu Chole, "Constraints to Industrial Development in Ethiopia," In An. A. Gromyko (ed.) *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of the Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. I (Moscow: Nauka Publisher, 1988), p. 151.

⁴Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935* (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University Press, 1968), p. 393.

⁵Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern...*, p. 87.

⁶Three different Amharic terms such as *dämwäz* [ደመወዝ], *menda* [ምንዳ] and *assäb* [አሰብ] have been used to refer to a wage in Ethiopia. They have been used interchangeably for a long time. The wage earner or labourer has also been known as *dämwäztäna* [ደመወዝተኛ], *mendäna* [ምንደኛ] and *balassäb* [ባለአሰብ]. But, I did not get any clue as to why *dämwäz* has widely been used to refer to wage in Ethiopia to this day. See also the dictionaries prepared by Dästa Täkläwold, p. 356 and 787 and Ethiopian Language Research Center, p.457, 81 and 315.

⁷Richard Pankhurst, "Status, Division of Labour and Employment in the Twentieth- Century Ethiopia," in Alula Pankhurst's (ed.) *Ethnological Society Bulletin* Vol. I, No. 1-10 and Vol. II, No. 1, 1953-1961 , 2002, p. 428.

Even though the commoditization of labour has significantly developed since the advent of capitalism into Ethiopia at the end of the nineteenth century, but mainly at the beginning of the twentieth century, human labour had been used in different forms in the country. Thus, it is imperative to examine the trajectories of the commoditization of human labour before the advent of capitalism into the country that contributed a lot to the birth and development of wage labour and the working class movement. Besides chattel slavery, in traditional Ethiopia, labour was used in the subsistence economy in which peasants who owned *rist* land and their family worked to produce their own consumption, as well as those of their lords. Likewise, though they were segregated, craftsmen and traders also laboured largely on their own account.⁸

In addition, peasants were forced to provide labour as *elf*⁹ to the feudal lords and their companions who required transportation service whenever they traversed through their villages. In fact, so far there is no clear evidence concerning as to when such an institution of feudal labour dues was introduced. Perhaps, it might have been introduced in the early medieval period. For instance, Francisco Alvarez who arrived in Ethiopia in 1520 noted that his luggage was carried by around five to six hundred people across the Märäb River. He added that such carrying system was named as *elfa*.¹⁰

Likewise, the construction of the road from Addis Ababa to Addis Alām in 1902 was fully carried out by *elf*. Emperor Menilek II ordered all his local governors to send him around 1000

⁸Richard Pankhurst, "Italian and 'Native' Labour During the Italian Fascist Occupation of Ethiopia, 1935-1941," A Paper Presented in the University of Ghana, Legon Conference on Innovation in African Economic History in December, 14-20, 1971, p. 1.

⁹*Elf* was a feudal corvée labour institution imposed on the peasantry. It describes transporting the personal materials and goods of the lord in times of peace and provisions in times of war.

¹⁰Francisco Alvarez, *Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Abyssinia during the Years 1520-1527*, Translated by Lord Stanley Alderley (New York: The Hakluyt Society, Reprinted in 1970), pp.74-76.

peasants each to construct this road. Thus, around 50, 000 forced labourers who came from all over the country under the supervision of an Italian Engineer, Castagna constructed the road.¹¹ This forced labour institution continued to be practiced in the country until it was totally abolished on 23rd Teqemt 1925 EC (3 November 1932). The proclamation stated that:

...ባለመሬትም በመሬትህ ከምትገብረው በላይ በመጥን እና እልፍ በመሸከም የነበረብህን ትዕዛዝ ህግ የሌለው ዕዳ ስለ መሆኑ የመጥንና የእልፍን የግድ ትዕዛዝ በዚህ የተነሳ ዳፈን እንዳትበላ ፍቁልሃለሁ። አገረ ገዥም ሹማምትም በግዛትህ ወዲያ ወዲህ ስትዘዋወር በዋጋህ ግዛ እንጅ በዕልፍና በመጥን ድህውን አዘህ አታስቸግርብኝ። ባላገርም መጥን ሳር እንጨት ዕልፍ ተመሸከም በአዋጅ ከተማርኩ ብለህ በጉልበትህ የምታገኘውን ገንዘብ እንጨትና ሳር አልሸጥም እያልህ በሰንፍና አንተም ሸጠህ የምታገኘውን ጥቅም አስቀርተህ መንገደኛም አታውከብኝ ዋጋውም በህግ ይወሰንልሃል።¹²

... I have banned elf and mäten¹³ which were illegal dues imposed over the land owners in addition to land tax to avoid any possible penalty which would appear as a result of their procrastination. Regional governors and appointees have to hire your own labourers when you are travelling, and stop troubling the poor by imposing elf and mäten over them. You, Land owners! Realizing that you are relieved from the liabilities of mäten and elf by the law, you should not refuse to sell fire wood and grass and lose the income that you would earn from it and also you should not be idle and harass the passers-by. The price will be set by the law.

Besides *elf*, *yä hudad* was also one of the corvee labour institutions where peasants were forced to provide their labour on the farm of their lord and some of his functionaries.¹⁴ This type of forced labour invested on the *hudad* generally took a third of the peasant's labour time.¹⁵ A number of other imperial estates were also cultivated by corvée labour.¹⁶ Several forms of *yä gulbät eda* (labour dues) were also imposed upon the peasants. For instance, peasants were

¹¹ Aleme Eshete, "The Peasant Worker Transformation in the History of the Ethiopian Proletariat, (1900-1935)," A Paper Presented in East Africa Conference on Aspects of the Economic History of Eastern Africa, Nazeret: December, 1982, p. 7.

¹² Mahteme Selassie Welde Mesqel, *Zekrä Nägär* (Addis Ababa: Berhan ena Sälam Printing Press, 1962 EC), p. 423; Aleme Eshete, "The Peasant Worker Transformation in the ...," p. 16.

¹³ *Mäten* was one type of feudal dues practiced in Ethiopia until the early twentieth century. It refers the grass and firewood which were provided for the lords and his companions by the *gäbbars* whenever they travelled through their village.

¹⁴ Juanna Mantel-Niecko, *The Role of Land Tenure in the System of Ethiopian Government in Modern Times*, Translated by Adam Robinski Krzysztow (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1980), pp. 91-92.

¹⁵ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern...*, p. 87.

¹⁶ Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution* (London: Review of African Political Economy, 1975), p. 32.

forced to construct the houses of the ruling class and of the clergy. They were also forced to construct granaries, grind grain, hew firewood and repair fences for local governors.¹⁷

Peasants had also the obligation to work on the *rim* and *sämon* lands of church officials and the church respectively.¹⁸ Häbtamu Mängestè has discussed the type of forced labour used on the *rim* and *sämon* land extensively. He argued that the ruling class and soldiers relied heavily on the labour of peasants to farm their land. For instance, most of the time, lords were granted land along with peasants who provided labour to farm the land. Moreover, Häbtamu referred the system of using forced labour on the land of the church and its functionaries as *zègenät*. He described that "...zègnät was the most common method of utilizing the labour of others in land under the jurisdiction of churches."¹⁹

Besides the use of chattel slavery and forced labour institutions as important sources of labour in the country, however, the development of wage labour was also hindered by the traditional culture which looked down upon and discouraged people's inventiveness, creativeness and tradition of craft and industry. Skilled craftsmen and other manual workers were considered inferior and often segregated.²⁰ Manual work had been considered inferior to all types of works and no one was eager to engage in it. For instance, in his controversial book, *Abyssinia: The Powder Barrel*, Roman Prochazka noted that "...In Ethiopia work has always been looked down

¹⁷*Ibid*, p. 33; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern...*, p. 87; Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896-1974* (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press Inc, 1995), pp. 88-89; Mahteme Selassie Welde Mesqel, "The Land System of Ethiopia," *Ethiopian Observer*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 1957, pp. 289-290.

¹⁸Juanna Mantel-Niecko, *The Role of Land Tenure in the System of Ethiopian ...*, pp.108-112; Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia* (London: Julian Friedman Publishers Ltd, 1975), p. 110.

¹⁹Häbtamu Mengistie, "Land Tenure and Agrarian Social Structure in Ethiopia, 1636-1900," PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign: Department of History, 2011, pp. 183-184.

²⁰Lynn G. Morehous, "Ethiopian Labor Relations: Attitudes, Practice and Law," *Journal of Ethiopian Law*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1969, p. 3.

on, as being a thing to be ashamed of."²¹ Even though handicraft workers were responsible for long for the manufacture in many parts of the country of a wide variety of equipments of considerable economic, social and military importance, they have lived in constant danger.²² Traditional elites and their subordinates looked down upon manual work and related activities that initiated individuals for creativity, nimbleness and invention. The ruling class not only assigned derogatory names to the craftsmen but also relegated them to the status of second class citizens. Handicraft workers were resigned to their culturally imposed social position.²³

Despite its discriminatory practices against artisans, however, the ruling class voraciously consumed the products of those people. It was only after the middle of the nineteenth century that some Ethiopian rulers including Emperor Tèwodros II began to recognize handicraft workers and appreciate their work. Handicraft workers, however, began to be legally recognized only under Emperor Menilek II who realized their precarious condition, for the first time, and issued a proclamation in favor of them on 25 January 1908 (*Ter* 17, 1900 EC). The proclamation stated that:

...ሰራተኛን በሰራው የምትሰድብ ተወኝ። ...ከዚህ ቀድሞ ብረት ቢሰራ ጠይብ፤ ሸማ ቢሰራ ሸማኔ፤ ቢፅፍ ጠንቋይ፤ ቤተክርስቲያን ቢያገለግል ደብተራ እያላችሁ፤ አርሶ ነጮን ከጥቁሩ አምርቶ የሚያገባውን አራሽ ከዘውድ ይበልጣል የሚባለውን ገበሬ እያላችሁ፤ ነጋዴን ነግዶ ወርቁን ግምጃውን ይዞ ቢገባ አንተ ነጋዴ ገጣባ አጣቢ እያላችሁ በየሰራው ሁሉ ትሰድባላችሁ። ...ሁሉ በዘንተኛ ከሆነ መንግስት የለ አገር የለ። ...እናንተ ግን እንዲህ እየተሳደባችሁ ማረሻ የሚያሾል አሳጥታችሁ አገሬን ባዶ ልታደርጓትና ልታጠፏት ነው። ...እንግዲህ ግን እንዲህ ብሎ የተሳደበ እኔን የሰደበ ነው እንጅ ሌላውን መስደብ አይደለም፤ ዳግመኛ ግን ሲሳደብ የተገኘ ሰው አንዳንድ አመት ይታሰራል፤ ሹማምትም አስረህ አመት ለማስቀመጥ የሚቸግርህ የሆነ እንደ ሆነ አስረህ ወዲህ ስደድለኝ።²⁴

²¹Roman Prochazka, *Abyssinia: The Powder Barrel* (London: British News Agency, 1935), p. 22.

²²Richard Pankhurst, *A Social History of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1990), pp. 222-223.

²³Kebebew Daka, "The Role of Artisans' Cooperatives in the Development of the Ethiopian Cottage Industry," *A Paper Presented at the Institute of Development Research Seminar on Industrial Transformation in Ethiopia*, Nazeret, 18-20 January 1980, p. 121.

²⁴Mahteme Selassie Welde Mesqel, *Zekrā Nāgār* ..., pp. 421-422.

...Let those who insult the workers on account of their labour cease to do so! So far, you called those who did metal works *ṭäyeb* [blacksmith]; those who wove *šamma* [cotton sheet] you called *šammanè* [weaver]; those who wrote you called *ṭānqway* [witch doctor]; those who served the church you called *dābtāra* [chorister or scribe]; those who ploughed the land and produced all our crops and are believed to be more esteemed than the crown you called *gābārè* [farmer]; and those who brought you gold and curtain you called *nāgadè gāṭaba aṭabi* [merchants who wash the back sore of pack animals]. If we are all inert there will be no government and no country. ...You by your insults and insinuations are threatening to leave my country without artisans who can even make the plough. ...Hereafter anyone who insults these people is insulting me personally. Anyone found insulting them again will be detained for about a year. You, dignitaries! if you have difficulty to detain those insulters for about a year, send me fettered.

So far scholars have not yet found clear evidence to provide answer for the question: when and where did wage labour start in Ethiopia for the first time? In fact, it is very difficult to provide an undisputable answer for the question. According to traveler accounts, however, the commoditization of labour in Ethiopia can be traced back as the early nineteenth century. The payment was, however, very irregular and mostly done in kind. Among others, mules, horses, shields, spears, *amolè* [bars of salt], and clothes were often used to pay labourers. For instance, Henry Salt, a British Artist, collector of antiquities, government official and traveler, who visited the court of *Ras Wäldä Selassè* in northern Ethiopia in 1805 cited in his writing about the existence of wage labour in Tegräy. He noted that *Ras Wäldä Selassè* gave some pieces of cloth which could not be worth more than ten dollars to each of his servants for their two years service. Even one of Salt's companion, Mr. Pearce who served as an advisor for *Ras Wäldä Selassè*'s army for about nine months was paid only ten pieces of cloth.²⁵

²⁵Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of the Country* (London: W. Bulmer and Co. Cleveland Row, St. James's, 1814), p. 269.

Likewise, Mansfield Parkyns, an English traveler and amateur artist who visited northern Ethiopia from 1843-1845 produced a similar account. In his account, Parkyns described the situations of labour in Tegray in comparison with what he saw in his country. He, for instance, noted that a common servant in Tegray usually received about some pieces of cloth and four or five *madgas* of corn for a year which altogether was worth not more than eight dollars.²⁶

Walter Plowden, who served as British consul to Ethiopia in the years between 1847 and 1860 also described that the labour relations practiced in the country was very similar with a master-servant kind of relations. Wages were rarely paid. Workers made no demands; rather they merely accepted an occasional gift of a horse, mule, cloth, sword or whatever other thing was given to them. He further noted that wages were paid almost entirely in kind and they were not even enough to cover their subsistence.²⁷ Henry Stern, son of a German Jewish family who later converted into Protestantism, visited Ethiopia in 1860. In his writing about Bègèmeder during the reign of Emperor Tewodros II, Stern stated that the average wage for workers who served a reputable merchant or royal officer was not more than two or three dollars for the entire year. He further added that even this meager amount was not always paid.²⁸

The extensive and widespread use of the Maria Theresa dollar in Ethiopia in the second half of the nineteenth century contributed significantly to the impetus of wage labour development in the country. Thereafter, wage payments in money became more common in many areas of the

²⁶Mansfield Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia: Being Notes Collected during Three Years ' Residence and Travels in the Country*, Vol. II (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1953), p.320; Richard Pankhurst, " Status, Division of Labour and...", p. 428.

²⁷Walter C. Plowden, *Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1868), pp. 141-142.

²⁸Henry A. Stern, *Wanderings among the Falashas in Abyssinia*, Second Edition (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1968), pp. 319-320.

country. It made payment easier and contributed to the development of wage labour.²⁹ The late nineteenth and early twentieth century also witnessed the introduction of new currencies in the country. For instance, Emperor Menilek II introduced a new national currency in 1894 and coins and notes were minted subsequently. This development, eventually, resulted in the establishment of the Bank of Abyssinia in 1905. Emperor Haile Selassie I also strengthened this endeavor by minting new currencies. The introduction of new currencies and the establishment of financial institutions further enhanced the momentum of wage labour development in the country.³⁰

Another historical process which contributed a lot to the development of wage labour was the abolition of slavery. As I have mentioned earlier slave labour was often preferred to hired labour for work by the traditional society until the early twentieth century. This was perhaps one of the main reasons for the failure of many Ethiopian Emperors to abolish slavery. Among others, Emperor Tewodros II (1855-68), Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-89) and Emperor Menilek II (1889-1913) had issued successive decrees to abolish slavery, but their endeavor proved futile.³¹ The perpetuation of slavery in the country, however, began to face a serious challenge sometime after the end of the First World War (WWI) when the League of Nations adopted the abolition of slavery as one of the criteria for membership. Consequently, Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930-1974) engaged in issuing successive anti-slavery proclamations to regulate and eventually abolish it once and for all. For instance, a year after Ethiopia was admitted as a member of the League of Nations, he issued an edict to abolish slavery on 31 March 1924. The abolition of

²⁹Richard Pankhurst, "The Maria Theresa Dollar in Pre-War Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1963, p. 12; Eshetu Chole, "Constraints to Industrial Development in Ethiopia," In An. A. Gromyko (ed.) *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of the Ethiopian Studies*, Volume I (Moscow: Nauka Publisher, 1988), p. 151; Richard Pankhurst, "Status, Division of Labour and...", p. 428.

³⁰Richard Pankhurst, "Ethiopian Monetary and Banking Innovations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. I, No. 2, July 1963, p. 64.

³¹Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History...*, pp. 92-93.

slavery demonstrated not only the modernizing zeal of the Emperor but also conveyed a message to Europeans that Ethiopia was not in a position to accept any foreign "modernizer" or "mandate for modernization". Regardless of the Emperor's attempt to abolish slavery, the country did not escape the Italian invasion for which the pervasiveness of slavery in the country was taken as a pretext.³² Be that as it may, it was after the defeat and evacuation of Fascist Italy from Ethiopia that slavery and slave trade were abolished on 26 August 1942.³³

As a consequence of the abolition of slavery, wage labour began to grow in the country. In fact, the demonization of slavery as a practice of an uncivilized society on the one hand and the praise of wage labour as a manifestation of a civilized society on the other hand further hastened the disappearance of the former and the development of the latter. This transformation was not unique to Ethiopia; rather it was a worldwide phenomenon. For instance, Marcel Linden argued that "...while wage labour grew quantitatively more and more important in the course of time, the relative proportion of slavery as well as other forms of forced labour declined worldwide."³⁴

Like chattel slavery, feudal labour dues were also, eventually, abolished and substituted by wage labour. It was during the occupation period that Fascist Italians made serious attempt to stop tribute and labour dues which were the economic basis of feudal Ethiopia. This was done just to convey a message to the world that it conquered Ethiopia only to "civilize" its people. The Italian attempt to abolish forced labour was later strengthened by Emperor Haile Selassie I who proclaimed several decrees in the postwar period. The replacement of the age old *geber* system

³²Christine Whyte, "Everyone knows the Laws Bring the Greatest Benefits to Mankind: The Global and Local Origins of Anti-Slavery in Abyssinia, 1888-1942," *A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 2014, p. 13. DOI: [10.1080/0144039X.2014.895137](https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2014.895137).

³³*Nägarit Gazêta*, Proclamation No. 22 of 1942.

³⁴Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labour History*, Vol. I. (Boston: Leiden Publisher Ltd, 2008), pp. 63-64.

by the newly introduced tax system that compelled peasants to send their tax directly to the central treasury in cash, for instance, helped the emperor to forestall feudal labour dues which were attached to the tribute system; this helped to consolidate his centralization policy. In the proclamation issued on 3 November 1941 (23 *Tegemet* 1934 EC) the Emperor stated that:

...ባለፉት ባምስት አመቶችም የደረሰብህን ችግርና መከራ ተመልክተን ቀድሞ ትገብረው የነበረውን እኩሌታውን አስቀርቻለሁ። ይህም የምትከፍለው በብር እየተገመተ ነው። የብሩም ግምት ተቆርጦልሃል። የጉልበት ሥራ የቅዴታ የእንጨት የሣር ያመት ባዕል መዋያ የጢስ ሌላም ይህን የመሳሰለውን ሁሉ በፍፁም ፍቁልሃለሁ።[sic]³⁵

...Having recognized the difficulties you [peasants] have been through during the past five years, I exempted you half of the tax that you used to pay previously. The tax will be set and paid in cash. Corvee labour and all other labour dues including providing fire wood, grass, holyday gift and *yä tis* [a tax paid per hut] are fully annulled.

Regardless of this proclamation, however, peasants continued to provide labour dues on the farmlands which were under the imperial jurisdiction. Even though this proclamation did not totally abolish corvee labour in the country, I argue that it signaled the inevitability of the demise of all kinds of feudal labour dues after sometime.

Teshale Tibebu also argued that the abolition of feudal labour dues contributed a lot to the subsequent development of wage labour in the country. He further asserted that the centralization process replaced the *geber* system with modern bureaucratic taxation system by divorcing the governors from their means of rule (tribute from *gult*) and the peasants from their means of production (land) hastened the demise of all kinds of feudal labour dues which were attached to tribute.³⁶ This process also marked the demise of corvee labour as it was attached to the *geber* system and induced the peasantry to work for wages. The landless peasants became tenants and

³⁵Gäbrä Wäld Engeda Worq, *Yä Iteyopiya Märèt ena Geber Sem* (Addis Ababa: Tensaè Zägubae Printers, 1948 EC or 1956), p.79.

³⁶Teshale, p. 106.

began to work as share croppers or contractual labourers in the lands of the former *gultāñas* who took most the grants as free hold. This was most common in the southern part of Ethiopia though to some extent it was also practiced in the northern part of the country.³⁷ In the southern part of the country, the *gäbbars* were, eventually, reduced to tenants as a result of the preponderant privatization of land carried out during the centralization process.³⁸

The centralization process transformed not only the tribute system but also the labour situation in the country. For instance, the transformation of tribute into rent and *gäbbars* into *çesännä* [tenant] brought a fundamental shift in labour relations. Most of the labour services attached to the tribute system were repealed and evicted and impoverished tenants began to sell their labour on the basis of different arrangements of their choice.³⁹ They worked for the land lord either as sharecroppers renting his land or as contractual labourers. The rent was arranged as *erbo araš* (one fourth cultivator); *siso araš* (one-third cultivator) and *ekul araš* (half cultivators); the terms of contractual labourer were based on the agreement informally reached between the tenants and the land lords.⁴⁰ The proletarianization of peasants was further enhanced by the promulgation of Proclamation No.70 of 1944. Article 4 of the proclamation stated that all kinds of labour services traditionally imposed upon the peasantry were totally revoked.⁴¹ The proclamation helped peasants to get paid for their labour and this contributed a lot to the development of wage labour in the country. Regardless of the various attempts made by the government to create an environment for the proletarianization of the peasantry, the development of wage labour in the

³⁷John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, Third Edition (Addis Ababa: Shama Books PLC, 2006, p. 29.

³⁸Bahru Zewde, "Economic Origins of the Absolutist State in Ethiopia (1916-1935)," in *Society, State and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008), p. 105.

³⁹Teshale, pp. 151-152.

⁴⁰Markakis and Nega, pp. 151-152; Teshale, pp. 153-154.

⁴¹*Nägarit Gazêta*, Land Tax Proclamation No. 70, 1944, 1st November, 1944.

country before the dawn of the twentieth century was insignificant. True, the development of wage labour in all countries with pre-capitalist economies was marginal, sporadic and sluggish.⁴²

Though wage labour had started in pre-capitalist Ethiopia, it was with the advent of capitalist relations of production and the subsequent development of industrial enterprises that dramatic changes in wage labour development in the country. Some signs of capitalist relations of production in Ethiopia began to be seen as a result of the intrusion of foreign capital into the country under the aegis of imperialism around the end of the nineteenth century and particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴³ The relation between wage labour and capital has always been interdependent in capitalist relations of production. Wages are the sum of money paid by the capitalist for a particular labour time or for a particular output of labour.⁴⁴ Regarding the relationship between wage labour and capital, Karl Marx stated that "...the worker perishes if capital does not keep him busy. Capital perishes if it does not exploit labour power, which in order to exploit, it must buy."⁴⁵ Thus, I argue that it was the advent of foreign capital and the subsequent establishment of an incipient capitalist economy that resulted in the development of wage labour in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia had often been referred to as a backwater because of its isolation from the world economy for centuries. Since the late nineteenth century, however, Ethiopia began to integrate into the world capitalist system. Ethiopia's integration to the world's capitalist economic system was very slow and the country had an enclave status. Though it began in the late nineteenth

⁴²Marcel van der Linden, p. 46.

⁴³John Markakis and Nega Ayele, p. 37.

⁴⁴Karl Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), p. 65.

⁴⁵Karl Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital & Value, Price and Profit* (New York: International Publisher, 2006), p. 32.

century, the enclavistic capitalism showed great momentum in the early twentieth century with the opening of small scale industries and banking system in the country.⁴⁶

The Battle of Adwa was a land mark in this regard. It witnessed the beginning of a new chapter in the relationship between Ethiopia and the outside world. It was after the Ethiopians' resounding victory over Fascist Italians at the Battle of Adwa on 1 March 1896 that European imperialists were forced to abandon their colonial ambition on Ethiopia and began to establish economic relations with the country. The Ethiopians' victory in Adwa not only resulted in the recognition of Ethiopia as a sovereign state but also helped the country to become a market for free competition among the neighboring colonial powers such as Britain, France and Italy.⁴⁷

Adwa not only reversed the colonial aggression of Fascist Italy but it also restricted the full scale assault of Western capital on Ethiopia's economy. As a sovereign state, Ethiopia did not allow the direct control of its economy by Western capitalism which aimed at massive land alienation and plundering the natural resources of the country. It was rather through trade and concessions that western capitalism penetrated the Ethiopian economy. This penetration was mediated by merchants, consuls and experts and advisors of the ruling class.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Charles Schaefer, "Enclavistic Capitalism in Ethiopia, 1906-1936: A Study of Currency, Banking and informal Credit Networks," PhD Dissertation, University Chicago: Department of History, 1990, pp. 322-323.

⁴⁷Aleme Eshete, "The Peasant Worker Transformation in the History of the Ethiopian Proletariat, 1900-1935," *A Paper Presented in East Africa Conference on Aspects of the Economic History of Eastern Africa, Nazeret: December, 1982*, p. 1; Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 5; Theodore M. Vestal, "Reflections on the Battle of Adwa and its Significance for Today," in Paulos Milkias and Getachew Metaferia (ed.) *Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory Against European Colonialism* (New York: Algora Publishing Press, 2005), pp. 31-32; Robert L. Hess, *Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 58-59.

⁴⁸Bahru, *A History of Modern...*, pp. 84-85; Teshale, p. 162; Vestal, p. 32.

Consequently, a number of foreign merchants and companies flocked to Ethiopia and began incipient capitalist economic activities in the country in the first three decades of the twentieth century. This opened the door for the country to join the capitalist world economic system, although peripherally. For instance, the trade and market structures of Ethiopia in the prewar period clearly showed the existence of peripheral capitalism in the country.⁴⁹ The capitalist economic system which began to flourish in the surrounding countries under the full assault of imperialism and the influx of foreign capital into the country through concessions played a significant role in the emergence of a new mode of economic relations of production or incipient capitalism in Ethiopia.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, unlike the western world, the emergence of incipient capitalism as a new mode of production in Ethiopia was not the result of a bourgeois revolution. It was rather initiated by the ruling class's modernizing zeal and the subsequent intrusion of foreign capital into the country. Foreign capital was, of course, augmented by the locally accumulated capital of the ruling class who engaged in businesses like real estate, hotel, transport, small scale industries and later in large scale capitalist agriculture.⁵¹

As was common in countries at the periphery of the capitalist world economic system, the movement of capital goods from capitalist countries into Ethiopia was much smaller as compared to commodities. Moreover, the Ethiopian nascent bourgeoisie also engaged only in the tertiary sector, not in big industries.⁵² Be that as it may, it was as a result of both foreign and internally accumulated capital that the incipient capitalist economic relations of production emerged in the country in the early twentieth century. The emergence of incipient capitalism

⁴⁹Addis, p. 38; Markakis and Nega, p. 55; Teshale, p. 162.

⁵⁰Teshale, p. 156.

⁵¹Markakis and Nega, p. 55; Teshale, pp. 156-157.

⁵²Addis, p. 40; Teshale, p. 157.

with the development of industrial enterprises further enhanced the impetus of wage labour in the country.

Besides Ethiopian victory at the battle of Adwa, the modernizing zeal of Emperor Menilek II also played an important role for the advent of incipient capitalist economic activities into the country. He made the first serious attempt at modernizing and industrializing Ethiopia by initiating the flow of foreign capital into the country at the end of the nineteenth century and mainly at the dawn of the twentieth century. The Emperor started many enterprises in the industrial, transport, communication and construction sectors. These included, among others, ammunition factory, printing plants, railway line, telegraph and telephone line, saw mills, oil mills, food factories, flour mills, alcohol distilleries and brick factories. The establishment of these enterprises which largely depended largely on foreign capital in turn initiated the development of wage labour in the country.⁵³ The Emperor further contributed to the development of wage labour by issuing a proclamation asserting the dignity of labour on 25 January 1908.⁵⁴

The industrialization endeavor of Emperor Menilek II was further strengthened by Emperor Haile Selassie I who came to power after a long and tumultuous struggle for succession. For instance, some industrial enterprises were established a few years before the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935. Among others, Berhan ena Sälam printing press, Artistic printing press, Darmär tannery and St. George Brewery factory were the major industrial enterprises

⁵³Raymond R. Gemby, "Industrial Development in Ethiopia," A Paper Presented in Haile Selassie I University, in 1964, p.1; Aleme Eshete, pp. 1-2; Bakure Wolde Semait, "Industrial Development in Addis Ababa Area: A Miniature Capitalist Penetration," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1984, p. 41.

⁵⁴Mahteme Selassie Wolde Masqel, *Zekrä Nägär* ..., pp. 421-422.

which enhanced the development of wage labour before the occupation period.⁵⁵ Moreover, the wage rates also grew up along with the overall industrial developments in the country. For instance, miners in the gold and platinum mines of Wälläga were paid about five thalers per month which was much higher than what had been paid at the beginning of the century.⁵⁶

Even though the period of Italian occupation did not witness as many factories as would have been expected, a few food processing, building and construction industries were established. The Italians engaged mainly in the construction industry to maintain effective administration over Ethiopia. In the mean time, however, these construction activities which were conducted in various parts of Ethiopia attracted a number of wage labourers and initiated the proletarianization of the peasantry.⁵⁷ The Italians imposed yet another restraint on the trade and exchange of bonded labour that eventually created a class of free but landless labourers which in turn contributed a lot to the development of wage labour in the country.⁵⁸ Hence, I argue that though short lived, the occupation period substantially enhanced the development of wage labour in the country.

The first decade of the post 1941 period was characterized as the period of restoration and reconstruction of the Ethiopian state. Apart from this, most of the former industrial establishments were controlled and some were looted by the British. As a result, there was no much significant development of wage labour in the country in the period of British

⁵⁵Bakure, pp. 41-42.

⁵⁶Richard Pankhurst, "Italian and Native Labour...",p. 1.

⁵⁷Reymond R. Gamby, p. 2; Eshetu Chole, *Under Development in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), 2004), p. 26.

⁵⁸Timothy D. Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta: Modes of Production and Resistance in Pre-Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Shama Books PLC, 2010), p.223.

paramouncy.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, a remarkable development of wage labour began to be registered in the 1950s and 1960s when Ethiopia started a planned economy with the prime focus on import substitution.⁶⁰ For instance, the establishment of the Wonji-Šäwa sugar plantation by a Dutch company, United N.V. Handelsvereeninging Amsterdam (HVA) attracted a large number of labourers mainly from Kāmbata, Hädeya and Guragè and played an important role in the development of wage labour and the subsequent formation of the working class and workers' organization in the country.⁶¹

1.1.2. The Making of the Ethiopian Working Class

Structurally, the term working class is often used to refer to a social category which had an identity of its own through its relation with the various means of production. It is defined as "...those who have no access to, or do not make use of their access to, productive means, but who instead sell their labour power for a wage on the market."⁶² The working class concept first originated in Europe in the nineteenth century and later expanded to the rest of the world.⁶³ Even though the formation of the working class is often conventionally depicted as the direct and virtually automatic product of capitalist development, its development was obstructed by several factors. The factors which affected the making of the working class vary from one country to another depending on their socio-economic and political context. Regarding the formation of the English working class, Edward Thompson noted that "...the working class did not rise like the

⁵⁹Eshetu, *Under Development...*, p. 27.

⁶⁰*Ibid*, pp. 36-37.

⁶¹Bahru Zewde, "Environment and Capital: Notes for a History of the Wonji-Shoa Sugar Estate, 1951-1974," in *Society, State and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008), p. 132; Killion, p. 433.

⁶²Sharon Stichter, "The Formation of a Working Class in Kenya," in Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen (ed.), *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1975), p. 22.

⁶³Marcel Van der Linden, p. 17.

sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making."⁶⁴ John Rule also argued that a working class could emerge when the labouring people developed consciousness of their self interest.⁶⁵

As elsewhere in the peripheries of the capitalist world economy, the creation of a wage labour force and the subsequent formation of the working class in Africa was essentially a product of the advent of European capital into the continent under the auspices of imperialism.⁶⁶ Even though Ethiopia has never colonized and exploited by European imperialists as they did in other African countries, the making of its working class was substantially initiated by the intrusion of European capital and the subsequent establishment of incipient capitalist economies in the country. The pattern of the proletarianization of the peasantry in Ethiopia paralleled the pattern of foreign capital penetration into the country. Likewise, the pattern of the making of working class in Ethiopia paralleled with the pattern of the proletarianization process in the country. The making of the nascent working class in Ethiopia can, therefore, be traced to the early twentieth century when Emperor Menilek II initiated foreign capital penetration into Ethiopia through trade and concessions and made the first serious attempt at modernizing and industrializing the country. It was in his period that foreign capital began to penetrate the country's economy and resulted in the emergence of largely foreign owned enterprises. And, it was these enterprises that, eventually, initiated the proletarianization of a substantial number of peasants in the country.⁶⁷ The promulgation of a decree which was fully in the workers' favor on 25 January 1908 also

⁶⁴E.P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working class* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 8.

⁶⁵John Rule, *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850* (London; New York: Longman Group LTD, 1986), p. 385.

⁶⁶Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen, "Introduction," in Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen (ed.), *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1975), p. 13.

⁶⁷Raymond R. Gamby, "Industrial Development in Ethiopia," A Paper Presented in Haile Selassie I University, in 1964, p. 1; Aleme Eshete, pp. 1-2.

further motivated them to work in the newly established enterprises. The decree imposed a restraint on insulting workers on account of their work. An Amharic term *sāratāña* was also begun to be used to refer to a worker.⁶⁸ This motivated a considerable number of Ethiopians to work for wages in the emerging industries and transportation enterprises. Thus, it was the proletarianization of the peasantry that, eventually, resulted in the formation of the nascent working class in the country.⁶⁹

Regarding the proletarianization of the Ethiopian peasants Teshale Tibebu argued that "... as elsewhere in the capitalist world economy, the formation of the proletariat in Ethiopia followed the same "laws" and patterns of separation from the means of production."⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the author did not explain about the laws and patterns of proletarianization that operated both in Ethiopia and the capitalist world. On the other hand, it would be difficult to argue that "the same laws and patterns" of separation from the means of production were practiced both in the capitalist world and in a country like Ethiopia where capitalist penetration was still uneven and peripheral. In this regard, B. Munslow and H. Finch argued that even though the proletarianization process in the Third World [including Ethiopia] was not yet clearly defined and a vague one, it was not the replication of the proletarianization process practiced in advanced capitalist countries. They further asserted that:

...the experience of the Third World has not been, on the whole, simply a replication of the kind of proletarianization that occurred in Britain and the other advanced capitalist countries, with the creation of a large scale permanent

⁶⁸Mahteme Selassie Welde Mesqel, *Zekrä Nāgär...*, pp. 421-422.

⁶⁹Killion, p. 11.

⁷⁰Teshale, p. 153.

proletariat, divorced from ownership of the means of production and thus totally dependent on the sale of its labour power for survival.⁷¹

Sharon Stichter also argued that "...capitalism on the periphery breeds a distinctive proletariat within a distinctive peripheral social context."⁷² Thus, it is very difficult to argue that Ethiopia followed the same laws and patterns of proletarianization like other capitalist countries. Rather, I argue that since Ethiopia was at the periphery of the world capitalist system and was characterized by incipient capitalism, it followed a distinctive proletarianization process that conformed to its pre-capitalist socio-economic system.

Since capitalist relations of production penetrated the Ethiopian economy through the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway axis, the proletarianization of the Ethiopian peasantry and the subsequent formation of the nascent working class followed the same direction. More importantly, the Franco-Ethiopian railway played an important role in this regard being an epicenter for the emerging wage earners.⁷³ It was by far the first large enterprise and the single most important agent of the proletarianization of the Ethiopian peasantry, particularly, in the pre-1935 period. It maintained the largest workforce employed in the country.⁷⁴ Both peasants and soldiers were attracted to work for wages in the construction of the railway line.⁷⁵ When the railway line became fully operational, it employed around 250 Europeans and 1500-1800 Ethiopians. As the traffic on the line grew with the commencement of international trade the

⁷¹B. Munslow and H. Finch, "Introduction," in B. Munslow and H. Finch (ed.) *Proletarianization in the Third World: Studies in the Creation of a Labour Force Under Dependent Capitalism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 1.

⁷²Stichter, p. 26.

⁷³Killion, 1985, p. 6.

⁷⁴Aleme, pp. 13-14; Killion, "Workers, Capital...", p. 150.

⁷⁵Aleme, p. 15.

work force also expanded. For instance, on the eve of the Italian invasion the labour force reached over 300 Europeans and around 3000 Ethiopians.⁷⁶

At the beginning, the workers in the Franco- Ethiopian railway line did not, however, seem to have perceived themselves, or to have been perceived by other Ethiopians, as belonging to or constituting a working class, that is, as possessing a collective social identity and agency. Primarily, as elsewhere in peripheral capitalism, many of the Ethiopian workers were not yet totally dissociated from their means of production; rather they were semi-proletarianized, gaining part of their living from production on land. Secondly, they exhibited more ethnic solidarity than class solidarity. As a result, the Ethiopian working class was still in the making and constituted only a small part of the total population until the early 1960s.⁷⁷

Some scholars have even pushed the formation of the Ethiopian working class to as recent a time as 1974. For instance, Thomas C. Killion argued that the Ethiopian working class remained as "a class in formation" until the 1974. He further asserted that it was during and after the revolution that the Ethiopian working class was identified as a unique category with its own identity with an agency. He added that it was during and after the revolution that Ethiopians began to regard workers as a distinct social category and perceive the nascent working class as a component of the Ethiopian society.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, it is very difficult to argue that the Ethiopian working class was formed as a result of the revolution, and became the agency of the movement. True, the public perception of the working class as a distinct category did develop during and after the

⁷⁶Killion, pp. 159-160.

⁷⁷Teshale , p. 153;Markakis and Nega, p. 157.

⁷⁸Killion, p. 8.

revolution because of the creation and use of terms like *särtoadär* or *labadär* or *wozadär*⁷⁹ to refer to the Ethiopian working class in the public and political discourses.

Even though the Ethiopian working class took some time to reach a modest level and fulfill the criteria of a "working class" in the contemporary European sense of the term, the making of the nascent working class solidarity was already started in the Franco-Ethiopian railway in the 1920s. The partial and racial based industrial hierarchy installed in the Franco-Ethiopian railway and the devaluation of francs after the First World War (WWI) contributed a lot to the development of the nascent working class in Ethiopia. Thus, it was along this Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway Axis that an embryo of the incipient working class was formed in the 1920s.⁸⁰

Even though the role of the Ethiopian workers was minimal in the 3-9 June, 1919 strike, it helped them to cross ethnic lines which were often manipulated by the French management, and enhance their solidarity in the work place. After the strike, the management solved the problem by addressing only some of the demands of European workers. This partial measure of the management brought Ethiopian workers together to defend their class interest. Thus, in the second strike, which was held from 28 March to 9 April 1925, the Ethiopian workers participated actively in the strike.⁸¹

After the strike, some of the demands of the Ethiopian workers were addressed and a few Ethiopians were trained to replace the Greeks. Nevertheless, working class solidarity was again affected when workers resorted to their ethnic cleavage and were manipulated by the

⁷⁹These terms are used to refer a worker who earns a living by working hard or by his sweat.

⁸⁰Killion, p. 174.

⁸¹*Ibid*, pp. 190-191; Desta, p. 135.

management during the period of Italian occupation and British military administration.⁸² The impetus towards the making of the Ethiopian working class, however, revived in the late 1940s when the Franco -Ethiopian railway workers started to fight for their class interest. Immediately after the French resumed control over the management, Ethiopian railway workers began to organize around some nationalist issues of equality of pay, benefits and job classifications between Ethiopian and European employees, and Ethiopianization of the management. The growing of the railway workers' class consciousness was also supported by some state officials who tried to use workers' revolt as an instrument against the French management.⁸³ Moreover, successive strikes carried out by the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers in the late 1940s strengthened their solidarity and further enhanced the growth of the Ethiopian working class.⁸⁴

The incorporation of some articles concerning the right of workers in the 1955 revised constitution and the establishment of the Ministry of National Community Development in January 1957 to deal with the various social malaises including the very pressing issues of labour also indicated that the class interest of the Ethiopian workers began to get due attention in the political discourse of the country.⁸⁵ The promulgation of a labour relation decree in 1962 further enhanced the consciousness of the Ethiopian workers and helped them to reach a stage where

⁸²Killion, p. 198.

⁸³*Ibid*, p. 396.

⁸⁴Desta Alemu, p.135; Bayu Bogale, "The Evolution of Labour Unions in Ethiopia with Particular Emphasis on the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Company Labour Union," A Term Paper Presented to the Department of Public Administration in 1963, in *Economics Miscellanea* 9, pp.10-11; Arnold Zack, "The New Trade Unions of Africa's Oldest Country," *The Analyst*, No, 3, 1965, pp. 29-30.

⁸⁵Article 47 of the Revised Constitution of 1955 states that "any Ethiopian subject has the right to engage in any occupation and to that end, to form or join associations in accordance with the law."; *Nägarit Gazëtta*, An Order to Establish the Ministry of National Community Development and to define the Powers and Duties thereof, Order No. 15/1957, 29th, January 1957.

they could fulfill the meaning of a "working class" in the contemporary European sense of the term.⁸⁶

1.1.3. The Emergence of Industrial Workers' Self-Help Associations

Due to the significant role that self-help associations, particularly, *edders* or *märädajas*, played in the development of workers' awareness regarding labour relations and the unfair treatment of workers by their employers, they were often assumed as the pre-cursors of trade unionism in Ethiopia. Regardless of international trade unions' influence in some respects as it was observed in the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Workers' Union, self-help associations gave an independent and indigenous character to the development of trade unionism in Ethiopia.⁸⁷ It is because of this fact that the study examines the role of self-help associations.

As in many other parts of the world, Ethiopia had and still has a number of indigenous voluntary associations engaged in self-help and other social activities. Self-help associations were created mainly to deal with major social malaises that afflicted members. They were, for instance, instrumental in lessening the burdens of members in times of birth, disease, marriage and death. Self-help associations were or still are responsible for providing communal aid in building homes, financing funerals and supporting impoverished members of the group in times of need. Ultimately, they aimed mainly at improving the wellbeing of members. They were often formed among relatives, friends, neighborhoods or individuals who work together. Among others, *edder* or *märädaja* (welfare association), *mahebär* (social/religious association), *equb* (credit association) and *däbo* or *wonfäl* (agricultural labour groups) were the major self-help

⁸⁶*Nägarit Gazèta*, Labour Relation Decree No. 49, 1962; Markakis and Nega, p. 57.

⁸⁷Desta, p. 136.

associations practiced in the country. The tradition of establishing self-help associations was common both in rural and urban communities since the early twentieth century.⁸⁸

As compared to other indigenous self-help associations, *edder or mārādaja* was the most widely practiced association both in rural and urban settings. It was established primarily to provide mutual aid for members in burial matters but, eventually, came to be also used to address other community concerns. It was also one of the most important community social insurances practiced throughout much of Ethiopia. It embraced a wide range of community members regardless of their sex, religion and social and economic status.⁸⁹ *Edder* is believed to have emerged in Addis Ababa in the early twentieth century. It began to show significant development during the Italian occupation period when life became precarious and many people were killed living no relative to bury them. The atrocities that Fascist Italians committed on Ethiopians forced the community to form voluntary self-help associations. In the post-1941 period, the number of *edders* in the country began to increase to unprecedented levels and eventually underwent significant transformations as a result of the establishment of a number of industries which also became the breeding ground for institutional *edders*.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Richard Pankhurst and Andreas Eshete, "Self-Help in Ethiopia," *Ethiopian Observer*, Vol. 2, No. 11, 1958, p. 354; Tamrat Bekele, "The Emergence of Labour Unions and Government Policy in Ethiopia," MBA, California State University of Hayward: Department of Business Administration, 1973, pp. 20-21; Alula Pankhurst and Damen Haile Mariam, "The 'Iddir' in Ethiopia: Historical Development, Social Function, and Potential Role in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control," *North East African Studies, New Series*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2000, pp. 37-38. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41931342>

⁸⁹Alula Pankhurst, "The Role of Indigenous Associations in Development, Their Past Involvement, and Potentials: A Comparison of Burial, Credit, Migrant, and Religious-Social Associations," A Paper presented at the Workshop on the Role of Indigenous Associations and Institutions in Development. Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers, and Anthropologists, Addis Ababa, 1998, p.3.

⁹⁰Alula Pankhurst, "The Emergence, Evolution and Transformations of Iddir Funeral Associations in Urban Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1/2, Special Thematic Issue on Contemporary Urban Dynamics, (June-December 2008, pp. 143. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41967613>; Mekuria Bulcha, "Eder: Its Roles in Development and Social Change in Addis Ababa," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of Sociology, 1973, p.13; Mulunesh Tenagashaw, "A Study of the Changing Role of Entoto Woreda Eddir Associations," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of Sociology, 1973, p. 2.

True, institutional or factory *edders* were post-1941 phenomena. It was not established by the community at village level; rather it was formed by individuals who work together in a particular institution, factory or enterprise. The first institutional *edder* is believed to have started in the transport enterprise. The formation of an incipient capitalism and the subsequent proletarianization of the peasantry in the transport and communications as well as manufacturing enterprises resulted in the establishment of workers' self-help associations to deal with the day to day problems created in their work places. Since then, *edders* began to operate not only at community and tribal levels but also at institutional and factory levels on the principle of mutual benefit. At the time when the relation between employers and employees was like a master-servant kind of relation, *edders* were the only viable medium for workers to deal with their problems.⁹¹ The emergence of incipient capitalism in the country since the early twentieth century contributed a lot to the development of such mutual-aid associations in the industries. Initially, *edders* were formed only at neighborhood level. Even though, community or territorial *edder* was the oldest of all types of *edders* in the country, the development and expansion of *edders* was, however, highly influenced by the growth of manufacturing industries in the post-1941 period.⁹²

A number of factors pushed factory workers to organize *edders* in their workplaces. Among others, the existing of a master-servant kind relation in the industries and the absence of a legally organized workers' union to protect workers' interests initiated migrant workers to look for social organizations that could substitute certain functions of the rural social structure. As industrial enterprises in Ethiopia were dominated by foreign capitalists who were mainly interested in

⁹¹Pankhurst and Andreas, p. 358; Alula and Damen, pp. 37-38.

⁹²Mekuria, p. 5; Dejene Aredo, "The Iddir: Study of an Indigenous Informal Financial Institution in Ethiopia," *Savings and Development*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1993, p. 79. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25830327>.

accumulating profits, they neglected the demands of workers and began to exploit them. Most of the time workers were dismissed from work without due process. They had no compensation during accidents. They were also paid only a meager salary as compared to foreigners. All these factors triggered Ethiopian workers to form self-help associations and to help one another. It was these associations which gradually developed into informal trade unions that could struggle for the economic interests of the workers.⁹³

Since most of the workers who worked in industrial enterprises came from rural areas in search of better life in the urban centers, they could not easily cope up with the new social life. As persons began moving to urban areas they sought institutions that could replace certain functions of the traditional rural social structure. Thus, *edders* were found to be important among workers to substitute for their rural broad kinship groups to help their members in times of need. Thus, regardless of their ethnic, age and gender difference, factory workers organized self-help associations for mutual benefit. They were employees' organizations in the truest sense of the term. At the beginning, there was no interference from management. Even those organized as fellow employees rather than on ethnic lines had no relation with the employers. Factory *edders* involved in solving the problems caused by employer favoritism, unexpected accidents, dismissals and illnesses. Thus, the problem of labour relations and the repression of the employers was the dominant factor that forced workers to form self-help associations or *edders* that could deal with their day to day problems.⁹⁴

Besides the small size of the work force in the country, hostility on the part of the management, and indifference on the part of the government were the major hurdles in the development of

⁹³Informants: Abära Abäbä; Tadässa Amarä and Abreham Mäkonän

⁹⁴Morehouse, p. 4.

formal workers' organizations in Ethiopia. Thus, it was the absence of formal workers' organizations or trade unions in the factory that, presumably, created a good opportunity for self-help associations to flourish. Thus, *edders* began to serve as effective and important type of mutual protection and benefit for the emerging industrial work force. These associations provided immense support to the workers in the case of death, loss of job, illness, accidents etc. Interestingly enough, they also emerged independent of both the management and the government.⁹⁵

Initially, the formation of self-help associations in any industrial establishment was not, of course, legally recognized. Needless to say, in most industrial plants, the self help associations were formed without the knowledge of the employers. Nevertheless, since *edders* did not pose any immediate threat to management, it was allowed to expand without any obstruction. In some factories, employers even had no information concerning the establishment of such mutual aid associations. The right to establish self-help associations was, of course, later recognized by the revised constitution of 1955. Article 47 of the revised constitution of 1955 stated that: "ማንኛውም የኢትዮጵያ ዜጋ በህግ መሰረት ማናቸውንም ዓይነት ስራ እየሰራ ለመኖር ማናቸውንም የስራ ማህበር ለማቆምና በማናቸውንም ማህበር አባል ለመሆን መብት አለው።"⁹⁶ Moreover, the promulgation of the civil code in 1960 further facilitated the formation of associations by explicitly stating their rights and obligations. For instance, sections 5 and 6 of the code provided the rights and obligations of the associations and their dissolution and liquidation. Articles 451 to 482 all dealt with associations.⁹⁷

⁹⁵Jeffery B. Tenner, "Industrial Relations in Ethiopia," A Paper Presented in the Department of Business Administration, 1966, p.1.

⁹⁶"Every Ethiopian has the right to engage in any occupation and, to that end, to form or join associations, in accordance with the law." See also, The Revised Constitution of 1955.

⁹⁷The Imperial Government of Ethiopia, *Civil Code* (Addis Ababa: Berehän ena Sälam Häylä Selassè I Printing Press, 1960), pp. 94-101.

On the basis of the newly introduced legal provisions, therefore, a number of *edders* began to emerge in industrial plants. At the beginning, these self-help associations, however, served merely as agents of fund-raising in time of accidents like death in the family, loss of job, and during weddings. Eventually, as the question of labour grew in the factories, *edders* began to serve as a stage for workers to raise their economic demands. Member workers began to express their resentment of the management besides raising fund to help the laid-off workers. Moreover, they often went to the palace carrying the Ethiopian flag to submit petitions to the emperor. They also began to urge their leaders to engage further in coordinating the workers' movement and challenging the management to meet their demands. As a result, the leaders of *edders* began to take over a leadership role whenever the workers revolted against employers and the state. A growing sense of working class identity and workers' strength exemplified by the experience of the railway workers and the successive spontaneous strikes carried out by workers at various factories encouraged the *edders* to focus not only on social matters but also on economic protection and protection against the illegal actions of the employers and the state. After 1961, they elevated themselves into covert labour unions providing the workers with a base for collective actions.⁹⁸

The transformation of *edders* from being only social agents into unofficial labour unions initiated a number of workers to be registered as members. They, thus, began to be regarded as protective devices for the workers against employers and the government. It was this solidarity created by these industrial *edders* that eventually formed an important platform for the development of

⁹⁸Seleshi Sisaye, "Labour in Contemporary Ethiopian Politics: The Case of Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions and its First General Strike," *A Paper Presented to the 71st Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association in New York, 1976*, p. 2; Kiflu Mekuria, "The History of Growth of Labor Unions in Ethiopia," BA Thesis, Haile Selassie I University: Department of History, 1973, p. 11; Tamrat, p. 21; Desta, p. 136; Arnold Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops in Ethiopia," Boston University: *Papers on Africa*, 1968, p. 105.

labour unions.⁹⁹ Thus, the genesis of trade unions in Ethiopia was associated with the indigenous traditional self-help associations. *Edders* were the precursors of modern trade unions in many industrial establishments. In general, traditional self-help associations were the precursors of trade unions in Ethiopia. Among others, the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Workers Unions, the Wonji-Šawa Sugar Estates Workers Unions and the Ethiopian Fiber Factory Workers' Unions developed from such traditional self-help associations.¹⁰⁰

For instance, the Ethiopian railway workers began to face several problems since the time of construction. They were paid meager wages and segregated in various ways by the management. Although they expressed their resentment against the management at different times, they could not get any appropriate answer because of the management's indifference towards Ethiopian workers. While European workers forced the French management to yield to a number of their demands and improved their material life between 1919-1935, the Ethiopians could not do that because the management broke their solidarity by exploiting their ethnic and religious differences. Thus, ethnic cleavage weakened Ethiopian workers' solidarity in the Franco-Ethiopian Railway transport industry in the interwar periods.¹⁰¹ From 1936-1946, the management of the Franco- Ethiopian railway was under Fascist Italy and the British military Administration. Ethiopian workers had no right to demand their right. True, Britain agreed to relinquish the management of the section of the railway which lies in the Ethiopian territory within three months time after the Ethiopian government became ready to manage the railway by

⁹⁹Desta, p. 136.

¹⁰⁰Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of an Ethiopian Labor Leader* (Baltimore: Publish America, LLP, 2010), pp. 54-55.

¹⁰¹Killion, pp. 169-170.

itself.¹⁰² But, because of the French conspiracy, the British officials changed their mind and transferred the control of the railway to the French on 1 July 1946.¹⁰³

Like the Ethiopian government, Ethiopian workers did not want the return of the French to manage the Franco-Ethiopian railway because they believed that the management would come with its former biased management style. Thus, following the 4th May 1946 agreement that confirmed the coming of the French to manage the railway, Ethiopian workers began to organize and strengthen their solidarity by crossing ethnic barriers through self-help association. Moreover, the workers were inspired by the nationalist rhetoric disseminated by the government which opposed the transfer of the management of the railway to the French. Thus, some veteran workers who were working in the central workshop in Dire Dawa such as Ejigu Gudayu, Täsäma Aba Saber, Awad Abdi and Farah Robälè established a self-help association.¹⁰⁴

This self-help association attracted a number of Ethiopian workers, who began to engage in defending the economic interest of member workers. For instance, the Ethiopian workers struck on 1 July 1946 opposing the return of the French management and the \$E 0.25 salary increment proposal for the Ethiopians as opposed to the 100 percent increase to European workers. The strike was organized by the leaders of the self-help association and some militant members attacked the Greeks and other European workers in Dire Dawa. The governor of Dire Dawa, Colonel Kassa Abräha blamed the damage on the British Military Administration, which had

¹⁰²Article 5/1 of the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement of 19th December 1944 stated that: The government of the United Kingdom will(a) relinquish the control and management of the section of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway which lies in Ethiopian territory within three months of receiving from the Imperial Ethiopian government a formal assurance that satisfactory arrangements have been made for its continued efficient operation, and (b)and transfer the control and management of the section of the railway referred to in (a) above to the organization specified in the formal assurance.

¹⁰³Killion, pp. 393-394.

¹⁰⁴*Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär*, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Enqeseqaè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 30.

evacuated its police force from Kāzira area without notifying the governor. The workers resumed work on 15 July 1946 through the intervention of the Imperial government.¹⁰⁵ This self-help association grew eventually into a formidable workers' union with the establishment of *Syndicate des Cheminots Ethiopiens* or Ethiopian Railway Workers' Union on 22 July 1946.¹⁰⁶

Like in the Franco-Ethiopian Railway, self-help association played a significant role in the Wonji-Šāwa workers' organization. Since the Ethiopian workers in the railway had taken experience from the European and Djiboutian workers' organization in the railway, they did not take much time to transform their self-help association into a workers' organization. It took them not more than two months. On the other hand, since the workers in Wonji-Šāwa sugar plantation had no such exposure, mutual aid associations were used as important platforms for workers' struggle against the employers. Thus, a number of *edders* were established in Wonji- Šāwa sugar plantation since early 1954.¹⁰⁷

The Wonji-Šāwa sugar estate was established on the basis of a concession given to the Dutch company, United N.V. Handelsvereniging Amsterdam by the Imperial Government of Ethiopia on 25 June 1951 (18 *Sānè* 1943 EC). Once the company received the concession, it started the pioneering work to change the difficult and semi-arid environment of Wonji into a workable place. At the beginning, the tasks of clearing acacia trees and bushes; digging irrigation canals; draining swampy places; constructing roads, bridges and aqueducts; launching anti malaria

¹⁰⁵Ministry of Interior Archive, MoI/ 17.2.139.6. A telegram sent from Colonel Kassa Abrāha to Wāldā Giyorgis Wāldā Yohanes, Ministry of Pen and Interior on 03 July 1946 or 26 *Sānè* 1938 EC; A telegram sent from Colonel Kassa Abrāha to *Yā Harar Gezat Endārasè* and to Wāldā Giyorgis Wāldā Yohannes on 13 July 1946 or 06 *Hamlē* 1938. A \$0.25 increment was apparently made for all Ethiopian workers who worked at different wage level. Thus, it is difficult to reckon it in percent.

¹⁰⁶Killion, pp. 399-400.

¹⁰⁷Informants: Abreham Mākonān; Kātāma Kāsimo and Šimāles Tāklè.

campaigns, reclaiming and cultivating the land required enormous amount of labour. The work was started only by 7 staffs, 119 non staffs and 808 seasonal workers. This was followed by the construction of factories, residential houses and labour barracks which also demanded a large labour force. In both phases, the company faced serious shortage of both skilled and non skilled labourers.¹⁰⁸

The shortage of manpower was partially solved when the company set up the first labour recruiting team led by an Italian labour recruiter, Stella, in 1953. The team was sent to recruit labourers from the densely populated areas of the country like, Wällayta, Guragè, Hadiya and Kāmbata, in the same year. The team recruited around 1500 workers from a number of ethnic groups though the Kāmbatas were the dominant group. They were found to be physically able to cope with the harsh conditions of cane cutting and other difficult tasks conducted in the estate.¹⁰⁹

The problem of labour began to be solved when the company created local contractors among the Kambatas who had strong relationship with the management. Thereafter, the Kāmbatas were not directly hired by the company; rather they were hired by the labour contractors and their number reached 3000 within five years. The total number of workers employed in the company reached 4,980 in 1956. Among the total workers, 4,900 were Ethiopians and the rest were chemists, technicians and agricultural experts from the Netherlands.¹¹⁰ The number of workers employed in the Wonji- Šāwa sugar estate in the 1960s increased dramatically. For instance, the

¹⁰⁸HVA-Ethiopia, "Annual Report for the Year 1973-74," pp. 23-24; Wonji-Šāwa Sugar Plantation Workers' Unions, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mameräčä Derejit Wozadär Ačər Yätegel Tarik," unpublished, 1977, p.1; Wonji- Šāwa Sugar Factory , *The Golden Jubilee of Wonji- Šāwa Sugar Factory*, A Bulletin prepared for the 50th Anniversary, 2004, p. 10

¹⁰⁹Wonji- Šāwa Sugar Factory , *The Golden Jubilee...*, p. 13; Killion, p. 433; Bahru Zewde, "Environment and Capital: Notes for a History of the Wonji-Shoa Sugar Estate, 1951-1974," in *Society, State and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008), p. 132.

¹¹⁰Richard Pankhurst, "The Wonji Sugar Estate," *Ethiopian Observer*, No. 5, June 1957, p. 148.

total number of workers employed in the Wonji- Šäwa sugar estate reached over 14,000 and the whole community of the estate was well above 30,000 by late 1960s.¹¹¹

As one of the largest labour markets in the country, Wonji attracted a large number of labourers from both near and distant areas. Besides the availability of labour markets at Wonji, workers ,especially cane cutters, came from various areas of the country attracted by their kinsmen who had formerly worked there and went back home collecting some amount of money that could supplement their agricultural production. Yet, the aversion to manual labour among the Jille Oromo, the original inhabitants of the area, also opened a good opportunity for other workers to work in Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate.¹¹²

Even though workers came to Wonji in large numbers from the various parts of the country, they could not find satisfactory living conditions in the estate. In Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate, workers were classified as permanent and seasonal. Most of the factory workers, office workers, technicians, health workers and field experts were employed as permanent workers. On the other hand, most of the workers who worked in the plantation, especially cane cutters, were seasonal. Seasonal workers were paid on a daily basis as labourers and encountered several serious challenges as compared to the permanent ones.¹¹³ The first challenge was the hostile environment. As it was a very hot and marshy area, Wonji was infested with deadly malaria. Consequently, many workers began to die of malaria. Moreover, the cane cutters were forced to live in thatched roofs built around the farm areas. As a result, they faced poor housing and

¹¹¹Duri Mohammed, "Private Foreign Investment in Ethiopia 1950-1974," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1969, p. 64.

¹¹²Bahru, "Environment and Capital:-...", pp. 131-132.

¹¹³Killion, p. 433.

medical care, lack of clean water and electricity and shortage of food. Workers were also forced to work from dawn to dusk with only a loaf of bread made of spoiled maize.¹¹⁴

The workers also faced equally daunting social challenges from their employers. As it was common in any industry established by foreign capital, the management of the Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate was totally controlled by the Dutch and other Europeans. A few Ethiopian staff members and clerical workers were placed next to Europeans in the industrial hierarchy. They were followed by permanent factory and plantation workers. The seasonal workers were relegated to the bottom of the industrial hierarchy. The last two groups of workers in the industrial hierarchy were often subjected to the harsh methods of the Dutch management.¹¹⁵ In fact, it was the lowest group of workers, especially the cane cutters who faced the harshest treatment in the company. Since they were not directly recruited by the company, the management was a distant master to the cane cutters. The company paid the local labour recruiter per recruit and he in turn paid to the capo (headman). The capo was the ultimate boss of the cane cutters. He in turn paid the *qončära häläfi* or machete controller on the basis of the *gari* or wheeled carriage loads he delivered and at last the money was disbursed down to the individual cane cutter based on the weight of the cane which later changed on the number of furrows he cut down. Since most of the cane cutters were illiterate and could not understand their contract they were easily manipulated by the capos and took whatever amount of money they were paid because if they refused they would be fired automatically.¹¹⁶ Thus, the seasonal labourers received only meager amount of wage for the difficult job they carried out throughout the day.

¹¹⁴Regassa Bayissa, "Labour Migration to the Commercial Farms of the Upper Awash Valley, 1950s-1990," MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 1993, p. 67; Bahru, "Environment and Capital: Notes...", p. 132.

¹¹⁵Killion, p. 434.

¹¹⁶Bahru, "Environment and Capital: Notes...", p. 132; Regasa, p. 68.

For instance, during the 1950s seasonal workers received an average daily wage of less than E\$0.90.¹¹⁷

The problems of the management were both structural and personal. Structurally, the management segregated in services and showed disparities in salary scales. Some social services like play grounds, swimming pools and lounges were reserved only for Europeans and a few Ethiopian staff members.¹¹⁸ The houses of the management were also modern villas with all amenities. On the other hand, the houses of most of the permanent workers were very small and made of mud, and with few amenities.¹¹⁹ Personally, individual workers were often treated brutally and inhumanly. As most of the management personnel and foremen came from Indonesia with a background of brutal methods of management and a colonial mentality, the workers in Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate began to face harsh treatments. The Dutch foremen abused Ethiopian employees on different occasions. A number of horrific accidents were often reported on both the seasonal and permanent workers. On one occasion, for instance, a foreman was said to have thrown a bucket of hot engine oil on the face of an Ethiopian worker who subsequently drowned himself into the Awash River and died.¹²⁰

The precarious living conditions coupled with the mismanagement of the Dutch made the workers very militant. They began to consider the Dutch management as "colonialist" and demanded that it would be replaced by an Ethiopian one. All these developments, eventually,

¹¹⁷Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Plantation Workers' Unions, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mameräča Derejit Wozadär Ačər Yätegel Tarik," unpublished, 1977, p. 2; Wonji- Šäwa Sugar Plantation Workers' Unions, *Wonji ena Tegelu*, A Bulletin published by the workers' union on 5 *Ter* 1970 EC, pp. 4-5.

¹¹⁸Killion, p. 434.

¹¹⁹Mulugeta Bariasselassie, "The Challenges of Health and Disease Control in Ethiopia: The Case of Wonji-Shewa Sugar Estate since 1954," MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 2001, p. 47.

¹²⁰Wonji- Šäwa Sugar Plantation Workers' Union, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mameräča Derejit Wozadär Ačər Yätegel Tarik....," p. 2.

pushed the workers to strengthen their work place solidarity by establishing traditional associations. Consequently, several mutual aid associations were organized by workers of different departments.¹²¹ Between 1951 and 1953, individual complainants expressed their resentment against the management but they could not bring any change. Since there was no legal provision and workers' organization to protect the workers' interest in the industry until the imperial government issued the first labour relations decree in 1962, self-help associations, especially *edders*, became forerunners of the workers' organization. They played the role of de facto workers' union and rallied workers against bad working conditions and whenever there was discontent against the management because of illegal dismissal of workers and low wages. Likewise, *edders* were organized in Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate. The first *edder* was believed to have been organized by the cane cutters who resided in a village called Kuriftu around the beginning of 1954. It was named as *Abbo Edder*. Following the cane cutters, workers from the maintenance department and a few workers from the factory also organized the *Garage Edder*. The formation of *edders* in the factories opened an avenue for workers to discuss industrial problems and strengthen their solidarity. They played an important role in agitating workers against low wages, mismanagement and bad living conditions. The first strike was carried out in 1954 and lasted about three days.¹²²

As a consequence of the strike, wages were raised from E\$0.75 to E\$0.90 and the spoiled maize flour was substituted by cash payment. A similar strike was also undertaken in December 1956

¹²¹Informants: Abreham Mäkonän; Berhānu Mamo and Arāga Enešaw

¹²²*Ibid.*,

for four days. Nevertheless, the second strike did not bring any improvement on the living conditions of workers; rather it resulted in the dismissal of the leaders of the strike.¹²³

A month after the second strike, a new *edder* called *Çat Edder* was formed by the workers in agricultural service department, laboratory and medical service department, machine department and a few workers who were dissatisfied by the activity of the *garage edder*. It was in this *edder* that the earliest clandestine movement was started. It was the most vibrant *edder* in Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate. It was led by Abreham Mäkonän who later became the president of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU). It first aimed at providing help for dismissed workers but eventually it began to serve as forum for discussions on labour relations in the company and a launching pad for the formation of the labour union.¹²⁴ The *çat edder* was successful in influencing and persuading other *edders* to come together and form an *aṭäqalay* or a general *edder* in 1959. The coming together of factory workers and plantation labourers together helped the leaders of the general *edder* to collect a great deal of money for member workers who were dismissed from work. Every member was required to contribute E\$2 for the general *edder* fund. Yet, they were also sometimes required to provide additional E\$2-3 whenever the number of those laid-offs became too high for the already contributed fund.¹²⁵

Apart from providing help to laid-off workers, *edders* could not bring a significant change on the life conditions of workers. Thus, a few workers further pushed the social role of the general *edder* to include economic issues. Moreover, since the management continued to be indifferent to workers' demands, they determined to take their case to the emperor in Addis Ababa. This

¹²³Wonji- Šäwa Sugar Plantation Workers' Union, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mameräça Derejit Wozadär Açer Yätegel Tarik,...," pp. 2-3; Regassa, p. 71.

¹²⁴Informants: Abreham Mäkonän, Berhānu Mamo and Aräga Enešaw; Regassa, p.72; Bahru, "Environment and Capital: Notes...", p. 135.

¹²⁵Informants: Abreham Mäkonän, Kätäma Käsimo and Šimäles Täklè; Killion, p. 436.

marked the transformation of the general *edder* into a covert labour union in 1961. The clandestine movement was started by a three day strike which lasted from 26 to 28 March 1961. A committee of thirteen workers was setup and sent to present their 27 demands to the emperor. It was led by Abraham Mäkonän, who was elected as a leader of the general *edder*.¹²⁶

Similarly, the Ethiopian Fiber Factory Workers' Union also traced its root to the self-help association established in the factory on 12 October 1958.¹²⁷ Even though the imperial government had made tremendous attempts to establish a fiber factory in the country before the Ethio-Italian war, it was during Fascist Italian occupation that the factory was erected. The Italians brought sack and rope making machineries from Dundee (Scotland) as it was home to this kind of industry. Though the fiber factory was erected by British Engineers in 1940, it remained dormant because of the breakup of relationship between Britain and Italy as the latter joined Hitler in the Second World War (WWII). The factory began production shortly after liberation.¹²⁸ But, the Ministry of Finance transformed the government owned company into a share company. Accordingly, an Egyptian company, the Sabeen Utility Corporation bought 85% of the share and the remaining 10 percent and 5 percent shares were taken by Ethiopians and two

¹²⁶IES/MS 3818. Abreham Mäkonän, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Amäsärarät Tikekeläña Se'el," *A Paper Presented to the International Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Īir 21, 1968 EC*, p.1; Regassa, p.73; Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Plantation Workers' Union, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mameräča Derejit Wozadär Ačer Yätegel Tarik...", pp. 4-5.

¹²⁷Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Enqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 37.

¹²⁸Richard Pankhurst, "The Industrialization of Ethiopia," *Ethiopian Observer*, Vol.1 No.5 1957, p. 165; Abiyu Woubineh, "History of Ethiopia Fiber Products Factory between 1940-1992," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 2000, pp. 1-2; Assefa Addo, "Economic Significance of Fiber Processing Industries in Underdeveloped Economies: A Case Study of the Fiber Factory of Ethiopia," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of Economics, 1984, p. 23; Ahmed Jemal, "Analysis of Development of Ethiopian Fiber Industry," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of Economics, 1987, p. 1.

English men respectively. The company began its production with a total capital of E\$499,300 and with 200 workers.¹²⁹

As it was common elsewhere in other industries in the country, the labour relation in the Ethiopian fiber factory was characterized by a kind of master-servant relation. The employers were virtually indifferent to the precarious living conditions of the workers. For instance, workers had no transport service, travel allowance, medical service, severance pay and other fringe benefits. Moreover, workers were denied paid annual leave, sick leave, mourning leave and maternity leave. The employers exploited the labour of Ethiopian workers by providing only meager wages. Yet, workers also faced several abuses at personal level by the managers of the factory. A number of shocking abuses were also committed by Mr. Charles Neish, the manager of the factory, on workers, especially on women workers. The incident of May 1957, however, shocked all workers in the company and brought them together to defend their rights. It happened on one of the workers of the company. She was seriously sick and requested the management a sick leave through her friends. Nevertheless, Mr. Neish refused to give a sick leave unless she came in person. She was brought by her families being unconscious and sleeping in bed. Consequently, she died on the way back home. The incident became a hot topic for discussion among workers and drove them to organize a self-help association or *edder* on 12 October 1958. Abära Gāmu was elected as the first president of the *edder*. After that, the *edder* began to serve both as a forum for discussions about labour issues and a center of support for laid-off workers. It enhanced also their solidarity and *edder* leaders began to present their

¹²⁹Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratāñoče Mahebār, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratāñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 37; Assefa, p. 25; Abiyu, p. 4.

petition to the emperor. Even though workers expressed their grievances several times to the management, they could not get response to their demands.¹³⁰

In the first petition that they presented to the emperor on 10 October 1960, the Ethiopian fiber factory workers demanded job security, paid maternity leave, paid sick leave, paid annual leave, paid mourning leave, good working conditions and the reduction of working hours from 10hrs to 8hrs. The emperor ordered *afānegus* Ešätè Gäda, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Interior to solve the workers' problem and promised the workers that their problem will be investigated and addressed within a month. Moreover, he ordered them to elect representatives who could follow up their cases and the rest to continue their work. Nevertheless, the problem was not yet solved after a month and the workers went again to the palace to express their grievances on 9 November 1960. Indicating that the problem was still under investigation, *afānegus* ordered the workers to continue their work. In the meantime, the *afānegus* was killed together with other Ministers in the attempted coup d'état on 12 December 1960 and their demands remained shelved for some time.¹³¹ On the other hand, the manager tried to divide the workers and weaken their solidarity. For instance, he demoted two representatives from their former position. Moreover, the manager penalized representatives whenever they went to the palace to follow up workers' demands. The workers were also divided as anti- and pro-management. This created clash between the manager and his supporters on the one hand and the workers' representatives and their supporters on the other. The continuous conflict between the two groups began to attract the attention of the government and the Board of Directors of the Sabeen Utility. Even though the government pressurized the board to take action on the manager, it continued to give

¹³⁰Informants: Gämäču Nägaš, Gälätaw Felatè and Fäkadu Amänjo; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 37.

¹³¹Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 39.

a deaf ear until it found another individual who could possibly replace him and manage the factory.¹³²

In the meantime, Abära Gämu, the leader of the Ethiopian Fiber Factory Workers' *Edder*, discussed with member workers about the necessity of forming an alliance with other similar factory *edders* to pressurize both the government and employers and get their demands properly addressed. He also asserted that the establishment of a strong national self-help association would help them to collect enough fund for laid-off workers. Thus, Abära proposed that a strong national self-help association should be created among the various industrial *edders* in and around Addis Ababa. After convincing his colleagues, Abära wrote an invitation letter to several factory *edders* in Addis Ababa on 26 May 1961 to send their representatives to a meeting on 28 May 1961. The meeting was held around the Ethiopian Fiber factory near Balča Hospital. Among others, Abära Gämu, Šikurlah Yusuf and Yifa Däsämo from Ethiopian Fiber Factory, Worqu Dämessè and Däjänè Mäkönnän from Fogstad Wood Works, Abära Abäbä and Gäbrä Mikael Wäldä Mädhén from Mosvold Wood Works, Bäjänä Mäkönnän from Heavy Freight Transport Enterprise and Šifäraw from Vaskin Wood Works attended the meeting. They discussed and agreed on the importance of the formation of a national self-help association to improve the living conditions of workers all over the country. The national self-help association was set up to carry out development and cooperative activities. The Ethiopian fiber factory workers took the responsibility to prepare the regulation of the association. Abära and his colleagues prepared the draft and brought it for discussion on 2 July 1961. After conducting a hot discussion on some articles of the regulation and forwarding some additional points to be

¹³²Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: UG, 2004 E.C), p. 30; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 39.

included, they agreed to ratify it at the next meeting to be held after two weeks. On their next meeting, on 15 July 1961, they included more representatives from shoe factories, transport firms, cotton mills, food processing plants, the Addis Ababa branch of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Workers' Union and developed the regulations. On the same day, fifteen *edders* endorsed the regulations and formed *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Yä Sera ena Yä Heberät Sändika* (Ethiopian Workers' Development and Cooperative Syndicate) as the first national self-help association in Ethiopia.¹³³

The leaders of the syndicate were also elected on the same day. Thus, while Abära Gämu became president and Dāmāna Lāmma was elected as vice-president in absentia, even though Ayälä Wäldäyäs, the vice president of the Franco- Ethiopian Workers' Union in Addis Ababa branch, had participated in the series of meetings. Regardless of Abära's effort to convince the leaders of the Franco-Ethiopian labour union to join the national self-help association, they raised several issues and remained reluctant for a long time. Besides the president and the vice-president, a secretary general, treasurer and other twelve members were also elected. They also rented a one room office from Šekurlah for twenty birr and employed two individuals.¹³⁴

The national self-help association aimed mainly to help raise the standard of living of the Ethiopian workers in general and member workers in particular by establishing income generating industrial enterprises. It envisaged establishing small scale industrial enterprises in which laid-off workers could get immediate employment opportunity. More importantly, it

¹³³Abära Abäbä, "Yä Mosevold Säratäñoč Anāsas," A Personal account, 1996, p. 2; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 42; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät ...*, pp. 32-34.

¹³⁴Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät ...*, pp. 33-34.

planned to establish sustainable income sources for old, injured and sick workers, and laid-off.¹³⁵ Regardless of their lofty goals, the registration process in the Ministry of Interior took much more time than expected though all formalities were fulfilled. This created dissatisfaction among the leaders and member *edders*. Consequently, though every *edder* was required to collect fund from its members starting 11 September 1961 as stipulated in the regulation, a great number of *edders* refused to contribute. Consequently, Abära's cooperative movement failed to meet its ultimate goal and remained nominal.¹³⁶

With the interventions of enlightened individuals both from the state bureaucracy and Addis Ababa University, however, the leaders modified the national self-help association and their lofty ideals and transformed it into a covert national labour union, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Heberät Derejit Sändika* (Ethiopian Workers' Mutual Associations Syndicate). The representatives of the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers union were in the forefront to bring this transformation when the Fiber factory workers became reluctant to change the old ways of workers' organization, the self-help scheme. After the transformation, the leaders aimed at handling employees' grievances and improving their economic status and working conditions through collective actions. This marked the beginning of a covert national labour movement in the country.¹³⁷

1.2. The Formation of Covert Workers' Organizations, 1946-1962

As explained earlier in this chapter, workers' self-help associations or *edders* were used as important platform to strengthen workers' solidarity. Interestingly, they also served as important

¹³⁵*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, April, 9, 1970, p.14.

¹³⁶Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär,"Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p.43; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät ...*, pp. 33-34.

¹³⁷*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, April, 9, 1970, p. 14; Killion, p. 443.

forums for discussion about social and labour issues among member workers. They emerged as independent institutions to serve primarily member workers. Since they were covert and conducted their activity clandestinely, some employers had no idea about the *edders* established in their industries. Nevertheless, even though they were independent and were able to provide fund for dismissed workers and their family, they could not address the economic demands such as wage increment, pension, severance pay and other fringe benefits. Their petitions submitted to the management and sometimes to the state officials including the emperor got no response. Needless to say, *edders'* social emphasis could not help workers to breach the material alliance between management and the state. The strong alliance that existed between management and the state could not give room for workers to stage a nationwide strike. Besides the strong alliance between management and the state, workers did not have the consciousness to develop effective strategy to achieve their material interest as most of them were illiterate.¹³⁸

A few literate and conscious member workers, however, began to shift the focus of mutual aid associations from their usual social functions into economic needs of member workers. Thus, clandestine movements were, eventually, started inside these mutual aid associations. The leaders of the associations often tried to link up workers' demands with very sensitive and powerful nationalist issues such as Ethiopianization of the management and equal pay for workers of the same position regardless of their race to develop their consciousness. This also helped them to attract a few educated persons who could advise them on how to form a clandestine labour organization that could break the strong material alliance between

¹³⁸Desta, p. 136; Killion, p. 448.

management and the state and protect their economic interest. As a result, in many industries, *edders* were transformed into unofficial labour unions or covert labour unions.¹³⁹

1.2.1. The Franco-Ethiopian Railway Workers' Union

The Franco-Ethiopian railway workers' union was organized during the late 1940s, at a time when serious confrontation began between the French company and the Imperial State of Ethiopia on the issue of control of the management of the railway. The confrontation between the French company and the imperial state on railway freight tariff broke the alliance between them and contributed a lot to the emergence of the Franco- Ethiopian railway workers' organization. The management of the railway line had been controlled by the Fascist Italians (1936-41) and the British Military Administration (1942-1946) respectively. As a result, the imperial government believed that the 1908 concession signed between Emperor Menilek II and the French company *Compagnie Imperiale des Chemins de Fer Franco-Ethiopien de Djibouti a Addis Abeba* was already abrogated by the French company during the occupation period. Therefore, the imperial government claimed to control the railway. Even though the 1908 concession signed between Emperor Menilek II and the company was already violated by the latter¹⁴⁰ and Britain also agreed to handover the management of the Franco-Ethiopian railway to the Imperial Ethiopian government in the Anglo-Ethiopian agreement signed on the 19th December 1944, the transfer of the railway to the Ethiopian state was skillfully obstructed by the French government and failed

¹³⁹Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga...*, p. 55; Killion, p. 448.

¹⁴⁰Article 11 of the 30th January 1908 concession states that: "...the company might not convey troops or war materials into or out of Ethiopia without a written order from the Ethiopian government, under pain of forfeiting the railway." Nevertheless, the company permitted the Italians to transport war materials using the railway line without the consent of the Ethiopian government.

to be materialized.¹⁴¹ The emperor's attempt to control the management of the railway through the American company, J.G. White Engineering Company of New York also did not succeed because of French protest to both Britain and the United States to protect its interest in Ethiopia. The imperial state opposed the restoration of the concession mainly because it threatened the sovereignty of Ethiopia as clearly witnessed during the Italian invasion. Nevertheless, after the emperor realized that he could not stop the French company from regaining the management of the Franco-Ethiopian railway, he started to negotiate with France to get control of the disputed Afambo region in the border between Ethiopia and Djibouti and acquire more shares of the Franco-Ethiopian railway stock and port facilities in Djibouti. The negotiation was concluded with the signing of an agreement on 4 May 1946. This agreement helped the French company to regain the management of the railway line a month before the end of the time stipulated in the Anglo-Ethiopian agreement of 1944 for transferring the railway line from the British Military Administration to the imperial state of Ethiopia.¹⁴²

The agreement testified to the failure of the Imperial government not only to get control of the management of the Franco-Ethiopian railway but also to make conspicuous modifications on the 1908 agreement. Consequently, though Ethiopia had the right to take over the management of the railway, the British Military Administration transferred it to the French company on 1 July 1946.

¹⁴¹Article V of the 19th December 1944 Anglo-Ethiopian agreement states that: "The government of the United Kingdom will (a) relinquish the control and management of the section of the Franco-Ethiopian railway which lies in the Ethiopian territory within three months of receiving from the imperial Ethiopian government a formal assurance that satisfactory arrangements have been made for its continued efficient operation, and (b) transfer the control and management of the section of the railway referred to in (a) above to the organization specified in the formal assurance."

¹⁴²Killion, pp. 393-394; IES/G.B. FO/371/53450. A letter sent from British Legation in Addis Ababa to Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign affairs on 12 June 1946.

Regardless of the signing of the 1946 agreement, the imperial state of Ethiopia continued to oppose the French takeover of the management of the company until the 1950s.¹⁴³

The Ethiopian railway workers also opposed the transfer of the management of the Franco-Ethiopian railway line to the French company. In fact, at the beginning, the Ethiopian railway workers looked at the transfer of the management of the railway line only from the perspective of their corporate interest. Thus, they expected that the French management would introduce better socio-economic benefits to the Ethiopian workers as they did to the Djiboutian ones. Nevertheless, as the company continued to use the pre-war freight tariff and discrimination policies on the Ethiopian workers, they began to oppose and look at the matter from a nationalist point of view. This was evidently exhibited when the company proposed to provide a 100% salary increase to European workers and only E\$0.25 to Ethiopians. The Ethiopian workers heard this proposal before the French takeover of the management of the railway line and held a spontaneous general meeting in the premise of the company on 29 June 1946. In the meeting, they discussed the importance of unity to defend their interest and agreed to form a mutual aid association. The mutual aid association was apparently created not to work on the social concerns of member workers; rather it was used to strengthen the solidarity of workers and defend their interests. This was witnessed when they went on strike immediately after the French management resumed control over the Franco-Ethiopian railway on 1 July 1946. On the other hand, the Ethiopian railway workers' movement to organize and defend their economic interest was also welcomed by the imperial government which was at the same time offended by the new

¹⁴³IES/G.B.FO/371/53450, A letter sent from the British legation in Addis Ababa to Foreign Office and British Middle East Office, Cairo on 4th March 1947; IES/G.B. FO/371, 63148/J737. A letter sent from the British Consulate in French Somaliland to Foreign Office, London, British Middle East Office, Cairo, Egyptian Department of Foreign Office and British Legation in Addis Ababa on 26th January 1947.

freight tariff introduced by the company. Besides strengthening the road transport and making it a formidable competitor to the railway, the state also began to use workers as an instrument to pressurize the French company. This created a good opportunity for the leaders of the nascent mutual aid association to agitate a number of workers against the company. When the company became indifferent to workers' demands, they went on strike and submitted their petition to Colonel Kassa Abräha, the governor of Dire Dawa district. Though they could not get satisfactory response from the governor, the workers were encouraged to elect their own representatives who could discuss with him concerning their demands. This marked the transformation of the workers' organization into an overt labour union.¹⁴⁴

The state continued to undermine the economic position of the Franco-Ethiopian railway line both by strengthening the road transport that linked Addis Ababa and Djibouti and by encouraging workers to struggle for their corporate interest and dignity. *Blatta* Kidanä Maryam Abära, who was both member of the Board of Directors of the Imperial Motor Transport Company (IMTC) and as controller in the Franco-Ethiopian railway, played an important role in weakening the economic power of the railway. The imperial government believed that encouraging the competition by deploying as many trucks as possible would force the French company to reduce the unreasonable freight tariff increase. On the other hand, the imperial state officials also did not hold back the growth the workers' movement in the company hoping that it would create pressure on the management. Thus, the workers continued to show their resentment to the management and demanded the end of the discrimination which had been practiced by the company on Ethiopian workers with regard to salary, benefits and job classification. Even

¹⁴⁴Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 30; Kiflu Mekuria, "The History of Growth of Labor Unions in Ethiopia," BA Thesis, Haile Selassie I University: Department of History, 1973, p. 6-7.

though workers' demands focused on the protection of their economic interest, they also had nationalist tendencies. The Ethiopian railway workers had already learnt a lot about the importance of workers' organization from the Djiboutian Railway Workers' Union or *Syndicate des Cheminots de Djiboutien* which was formed around the end of 1945. This further encouraged them to continue to strengthen their solidarity and struggle against the management by transforming their covert association into an unofficial but overt labour union. Even though the role of the imperial state in the transformation of workers' association into an overt trade union was unclear, it did nothing to stop them.¹⁴⁵

In the same day when the French resumed control of the railway management on 1 July 1946, the Ethiopian railway workers went on strike in Dire Dawa. Though the strike lasted only for half a day, it caused damage on workshops and on the houses of European workers, especially, on those of the Greeks. It was particularly violent in Dire Dawa because the strike coincided with the transfer of the municipal government from the British Military Administration to the Ethiopians. More importantly, the lifting of the British police force from Kāzira by the military administration without prior notice to the imperial government aggravated the destruction. The Greeks were seriously affected during the strike. The governor of Dire Dawa attributed this devastation to the British Military Administration. In his report to the Ministry of Interior, for instance, the governor expressed the idea that he found concrete evidence concerning the conspiracy carried out by some British military officers to destabilize the security of the town and discredit the local officials. The governor also discovered that the British military officers

¹⁴⁵Killion, pp. 395-396; Kiflu, pp. 6-7.

provided money to workers who went on strike. Be that as it may, the strike ended in the afternoon of the same day when the French company agreed to look into and respond to the workers' demands by the 15th of July 1946. As a result, the workers resumed their job in the same afternoon.¹⁴⁶

Even though the company tried to respond to some of the demands raised during the strike, it could not satisfy the workers. Nevertheless, the strike was suspended until the end of the year. In the meantime, workers were exerting concerted effort in transforming their mutual aid association into a strong and covert labour union which would defend not only their social concerns but also their economic interests. Thus, the mutual aid association was fully transformed into a covert labour union called the Ethiopian Railway Workers' Union or *Syndicate des Cheminots Ethiopien* on 22 July 1946. On the same day, workers elected their leaders. Thus, Ejigu Gudayu was elected president, Assäfa Gäbrä Maryam as secretary, Zäläqä Haylu as treasurer and other eight workers were also elected as members of the leadership.¹⁴⁷

In fact, the establishment of the Ethiopian railway workers' union was not hidden from the government. Since the state needed the organization to use as an important weapon to pressurize the company, it apparently did not hinder the activity of the workers. Interestingly, *Blatta* Kidanä Maryam Abära, the Ethiopian controller in the railway, and a few other imperial officials in the transport sector and the Ministry of Communication knew the activities of the workers but did nothing to stop them. Thus, even though the exact role of the state in the organization of the Ethiopian railway workers' union was not clear, it was welcomed by them. But, the state did not

¹⁴⁶ENALA, MoI/17.2.139.06. A telegram sent from Colonel Kassa Abräha to Wäldä Giyorgis Wäldä Yohannes, Ministry of Pen and Interior on 03 July 1946 or 26 *Sänè* 1938 EC.

¹⁴⁷Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, pp 30-31; Kiflu, p. 6.

officially or legally recognize the Franco-Ethiopian workers' union until the early 1960s. Immediately after its establishment, however, the workers raised several nationalist issues, including, Ethiopianization of the management, equality of pay, benefits, job category, pension, insurance and establishment of training programs and printing of regulations in Amharic language. It also demanded the end of all discriminatory activities and inhuman treatment practiced by the management against Ethiopian workers. But, the French management continued to operate the railway line on the basis of the pre-war regulations with only slight modifications. This further aggravated the resentment of Ethiopian workers and they began a two months strike on 11 January 1947.¹⁴⁸

In fact, the Ethiopian section of the railway operation had begun to stagger since 9 January 1947 because of the absence of key employees from their workplace. The actual strike was, however, begun when 800 to 1000 Ethiopian workers supported by other Ethiopians closed down the Ethiopian section of the railway line on 11 January 1947. Consequently, transit trade into and from Ethiopia came to a complete standstill and created great inconvenience in the region. As the strike took a dangerous turn, the Director General of the Franco-Ethiopian railway in Paris, Monsieur Gerbal arrived in Djibouti by air from Paris on 19 January 1947. The workers in Djibouti dropped their plan to strike when they heard that the director general came with full power to negotiate and with generous terms. Thus, the Djiboutian workers' agitation for strike was settled by providing a 25 percent wage rise and family allowances. Thereafter, the director general flew to Addis Ababa to negotiate with the Ethiopian workers. The director faced a much more serious problem in Ethiopia as the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers' union raised far-

¹⁴⁸Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, pp 30-31; Killion, pp. 400-401.

reaching nationalist demands that would bring significant changes in the industrial hierarchy and the management of the railway line. Since the Ethiopian workers presented their economic demands which were highly intertwined with nationalist political tendencies, the negotiations proved fruitless.¹⁴⁹

Moreover, the strike was supported by the local population and the imperial government. For instance, Ethiopian merchants stood behind the workers by providing financial support. It was also reported that the emperor supported the strike by providing a sum of E\$ 80, 000 from his personal treasury. Nevertheless, it was not made clear whether the fund was given to keep the momentum of the strike or merely to support the impoverished workers. Using the various supports provided by the population and the state, the leaders of the Ethiopian railway workers' union continued to oppose every deal proposed by the French company and remained adamant regarding their nationalist and corporate demands until the end of January 1947. As the strike continued, however, its effect began to be conspicuously observed in all economic sectors in the country. This in turn created division within the government and among the merchants who benefited from the strike and affected by it. The stamina of the strikers was also seriously depleted and workers were looking for an immediate compromise with the French company to terminate the strike around the end of February.¹⁵⁰

On the other hand, a few imperial officials from the transport sectors and the Ministry of Communications worked to prolong the strike. More importantly, *Blatta Kidanä Maryam Abära* vitiated the negotiations. The motor transport company had been in crisis because it was unable

¹⁴⁹IES/G.B. FO/371, 63148/J737.

¹⁵⁰Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC 1976, p. 32.

to compete with the railway. Thus, *Blatta Kidanä Maryam Abära* attempted to use this good opportunity to strengthen IMTC at the expense of the railway. For instance, the IMTC charged E\$35 British pounds per ton of freight from Addis Ababa to Djibouti, while the railway charged E\$13 and trucks to Assāb charged only E\$12. Citing the French railway officials, the British legation in Addis Ababa reported as follows concerning the negotiations being carried out between the French company and Ethiopian representatives on 10 February 1947.

...In the meantime, *Blatta Kidanä Maryam Abära* is according to French railway officials, deliberately spinning out the negotiations at Dire Dawa. If this is the case, the Ethiopian government who is of course, well aware of this attempt by the imperial transport company to feather their own nest at the expense of the country is pursuing a short sighted policy.¹⁵¹

Even though the IMTC was making profit during the strike by transporting goods¹⁵² from Djibouti to Addis Ababa, it was at the same time opposed by the strikers who felt that their problem would not get attention if the IMTC continued to transport goods in place of the railway. Thus, they attacked and destroyed some of the trucks and severely beat up the drivers.

Even though *Blatta Kidanä Maryam Abära* and his supporters wanted to prolong the settlement of the problem, the company and the syndicate agreed on a compromise around the end of February following the intervention of both the French and the Ethiopian governments. Under the auspices of both, a committee of seven individuals comprised of all stake holders was set up to investigate the demands of the syndicate. Accordingly, while Prime Minister Endalkačāw Mäkonnan, *Blatèn Gèta Zäwdè Bälayenäh*, Minister of Communications, and *Blatta Kidanä*

¹⁵¹IES/G.B. FO/371, 63148/J786. A letter sent from British legation in Addis Ababa to Arnold Overton, British Middle Eastern Office, Cairo; Governor of Eden, Egyptian Department of Foreign Office, London on 10 February 1947.

¹⁵²IES/G.B.FO/371. 63148/J851. A letter sent from British Consulate in Djibouti to British legation in Addis Ababa, British Middle Eastern Office, Cairo and Egyptian Department of Foreign Office, London; British Legation in Addis Ababa on 3 February 1947.

Maryam Abära, represented the imperial government, Monsieur Rousseau, the Director of the railway, and Monsieur Gerbal, administrator and representative of the company, were delegated by the French company; and Ejigu Gudayu and Assäfa Gäbrä Maryam joined the committee representing the syndicate.¹⁵³ The committee discussed the demands of the workers and finally reached an agreement on 6 March 1947. Workers were asked to return to their jobs within the next two days. In the agreement, the French company agreed to meet some of the demands of the syndicate within a few days and the remaining other demands within six months time. For instance, the company agreed to provide wages slightly better than what it had promised on 1 January 1947. It also agreed in principle to dismantle job classification and racial segregation in the industrial hierarchy. But, since Ethiopian workers had no French education, they were unable to pass the written examination and rise to higher positions in the industrial hierarchy. Even though the company also agreed to establish a training center for Ethiopians in Dire Dawa, this did not materialize until 1953. The agreement mainly focused on the national issues and left aside the corporate interests of the workers. Thus, the Ethiopian railway workers were still not quite satisfied with the benefits they received from the agreement. Moreover, the process of replacing European managers with Ethiopians was intentionally obstructed and delayed by the French.¹⁵⁴

The procrastination of the establishment of a training center in Dire Dawa seriously affected the Ethiopianization process in the industry. Since Ethiopian workers lacked appropriate technical skill and French education, they could not pass the examination and hold higher positions in the industrial hierarchy. Even though job classification and racial discrimination were officially dis

¹⁵³Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär,"Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 154.

¹⁵⁴Killion, pp. 405-406.

continued, they remained intact in the company. Moreover, the introduction of a strict industrial working system, *politique de rigueur*, in 1948 to enhance productivity and balance the high labour cost and massive capital expenditure that appeared in the immediate post-war period further aggravated the resentment of the syndicate. Thus, workers went on strike on 17 August 1949. It started in the repair shops and expanded to the other sections of the company. The Ethiopian mechanics in the locomotive sections attacked a number of French management personnel. Since the railway police and the local police did not intervene, several buildings were damaged, trains were derailed and other European workers were also injured. The French claimed that the strike was ignited by the government and they requested the Ethiopian state to take responsibility, pay indemnity and arrest the workers who had attacked French personnel. Nevertheless, the government refused to take responsibility and the French announced a lockout. After a month, however, an agreement was reached and the lock out ended on 22 September 1949.¹⁵⁵

The deepening of antagonistic relations between the Imperial government and the French company and the growing militancy of the Ethiopian railway workers in the late 1940s indicated that the French could no longer continue dominating the management of the railway in the old way. Moreover, the restructuring of the Ethiopian economy and the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia undermined the French economic interest in the Horn of Africa.¹⁵⁶ The development of the road transport from Assäb to Addis Ababa and air transport exerted considerable pressure on the Franco-Ethiopian railway. Even though the company reduced its tariff in 1954, it was unable to attract merchants and other passengers. Consequently, the company began to decline and came

¹⁵⁵Killion, pp. 11-12; Kiflu, p. 7.

¹⁵⁶Killion, p. 116; Kiflu, p. 7.

to depend on French loan and financial assistance.¹⁵⁷ The sharp decline of the Franco-Ethiopian railway line forced the French state and the company to negotiate a new concession with the imperial government of Ethiopia. As a result, the concession was signed on 12 November 1959 providing for equal financial and administrative power for both signatories. Thus, the Ethiopian government's share rose from 25 percent to 50 percent. Moreover, according to Article 2 of the concession, the legal personality of the railway was transferred from French to Ethiopian and its headquarters was also changed from Paris to Addis Ababa.¹⁵⁸

On the other hand, as the alliance between the Ethiopian government and the French company began to show significant development in the 1950s, the syndicate began to lose its support from the state. Moreover, as government shifted its economic policy towards expanding the industrial sector in the 1950s, workers' organizations, including the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers union, began to be considered as threats to the development endeavor. Despite the development of the Ethiopianization of the railway and the appointment of a few Ethiopian workers to higher posts in the industrial hierarchy, the Ethiopian railway workers union began to be considered as a dangerous organization by the imperial government. Consequently, the activities of the syndicate were disparaged, its demands rejected or ignored, and strikes harshly repressed by the state. For instance, the 1954 strike, which was carried out on the same day as the Eritrean dock workers strike, was stopped for fear of state reprisals. The late 1950s in particular marked the decline of the syndicate as a result of the decrease of the number of workers in the company in general and

¹⁵⁷Sylvia Pankhurst, "Beginning of Modern Transport in Ethiopia: The Franco-Ethiopian Railway and its History," *Ethiopian Observer*, Vol.1, No.12, 1958, p. 389.

¹⁵⁸ENALA, MoI/17.2.139.06.

the firing of a number of active participants in particular. The worst government's crackdown of the syndicate, however, came in 1957 when the leaders were fired and offices were closed until the middle of 1960. Following the coming of liberal managers and strong workers' leaders, however, the syndicate revived again in late 1960 and made significant contribution to the struggle for the legal recognition of trade unionism in the country and the formation of the national confederation, the Confederation of the Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU) in 1963.¹⁵⁹

1.2.2. The Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Estates Workers' Union

The Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate was one of the state-supported enterprises in post-war Ethiopia. It was established by the Dutch company, *United N.V. Handelsvereeniging Amsterdam* (HVA) in 1951. Among other things, the company was attracted by the state support promised under the terms of the 1950 Investment Decree and the low wages of Ethiopian workers.¹⁶⁰ The total initial capital invested by the company was E\$23 million. The company became profitable within a few years time and continued to increase its capital and expand its production. Thus, a new company, HVA-Ethiopia, was formed in 1958. While 80 percent of the capital was covered by the company, the remaining 20 percent of the share was sold to the imperial Ethiopian government and members of the royal family; this raised the capital to E\$28 million. This was soon followed by the establishment of Šäwa sugar factory in 1962 with a total capital of 22.4million. Thus, the total capital invested in the sugar industry of the country reached E\$50.4 million. HVA and HVA-Ethiopia further developed another company, HVA-Mätähara, with a

¹⁵⁹Kiflu, pp.7-8; Killion, 423-425.

¹⁶⁰Richard Pankhurst, "The Wonji Sugar Estate," *Ethiopian Observer*, No. 5, June 1957, p. 148.

capital of E\$ 56 million in 1965. The company controlled 51percent of the share while 49 percent was taken by Ethiopians.¹⁶¹

Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate was one of the major enterprises that employed considerable number of workers. Nevertheless, like the Franco-Ethiopian Railway workers, the Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate workers were highly segregated and exploited by the Dutch company.¹⁶² The traditional associations of the industrial workers set up to solve their social problems could no longer help them to improve their living conditions. Even though *edders* played significant role in strengthening the solidarity of workers and preparing the ground work for the later establishment of labour unions, they could not fully address both the economic and social problems that the workers often faced in their work places. As a result, workers eventually transformed their associations into unofficial labour unions or covert labour unions to safeguard their economic interests.¹⁶³

Thus, after a series of discussions on the importance of unity to collect enough fund and support laid-offs, they agreed to form *aṭäqalay edder* or a general self-help association. This move was spearheaded by the *Çat edder*. The leaders of the general self-help association, eventually, took new functions, including the presentation of workers' grievances to the management. The fund collected by the general *edder* was used to support *edder* members who were fired for protesting and instigating workers to struggle against abuses by the management. When the HVA management became indifferent to their demands, the leaders of the general *edder* presented their petition to the local authorities. Since the liaison officer and the police often stood on the

¹⁶¹Ehetu Chole, *Underdevelopment in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), 2004), p. 429; Duri, pp. 61-62.

¹⁶²Regassa, p. 65.

¹⁶³Desta, p. 136.

side of the management and attacked the workers, the leaders of the general *edder* often chose to present their grievances to Gètačaw Mādhānè, the governor of Yārār and Kārāyu *Awraja*. Nevertheless, the governor had no power to interfere in the internal affairs of the industry. Thus, militant leaders of the general *edder* formed a clandestine committee of thirteen members to present workers' grievances directly to the emperor in early 1961. This marked the rise of a covert labour union in Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate.¹⁶⁴

The thirteen committee members led by Abreham Mākonān called a three day strike that lasted from 26 to 28 March 1961. While the strike was going on, the committee travelled to Addis Ababa and presented a 9 pages petition to the emperor. The petition incorporated both nationalist and corporate demands including better working conditions, equal benefits and facilities, Ethiopianization of management and technical positions and an end to illegal dismissal of workers who protest against management abuses. Moreover, in their petition, the workers wrote an ultimatum to the emperor expressing that if their demands were not met within a month, they will leave Wonji cognizant of the fact that it was sold to the Netherlands. As a result, the emperor took the petition seriously and set up a committee consisting of three individuals from the Ministry of Trade and Industry including, the Minister, Endalkačaw Mākonnān and sent them to Nazareth town on 27 March 1961 to settle the problems. The committee discussed with the

¹⁶⁴Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Sāratāñoč Mahebār, "Yä Iteyopiya Sāratāñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 49; IES/MS, 3818, p.1; Killion, p. 436.

workers' representatives and the management of the company and met the major demands of workers and also agreed to meet the remaining demands in the foreseeable future.¹⁶⁵

After the discussion, the workers were able to secure most of their demands, including daily pay rise from E\$0.90 to E\$1.10, institution of annual leave, an end to arbitrary dismissal of workers, 24 hours ambulance stand-by for plantation workers, recognition of maternity leave, payment for overtime, eight hour working day, promotion only of Ethiopians to posts subordinate to those occupied by the Dutch, promotion of all seasonal workers with the exception of plantation to permanent, and providing leave with pay for workers' representatives whenever they travelled to submit their petition to the concerned body. The settlement was considered as a victory of workers over the management though some issues remained unresolved.¹⁶⁶

The committee, which was meeting with government officials and the management at Nazareth continued to act both as leaders of the general *edder* and the newly created covert labour union inside the general *edder*. Even though the leaders made great attempt to include all members of the general *edder* as members of the covert labour union, a few workers backed down fearing the double contribution. On the other hand, the management did not like the growing of a covert trade union inside the general *edder* and tried to create division between members of the general *edder* and the labour union. It succeeded in convincing and expelling a few clerical and managerial employees from both the general *edder* and the nascent labour union. Thus, it

¹⁶⁵IES/MS 3818, p. 2; Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union, *Wonji ena Tegleu, No.1 Tir, 1970*, p. 6; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Andenät ...*, pp. 39-40; Wonji- Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mamräča Derejit Wäzadär Ačər Yä Tegel Tarik," Unpublished, December, 1983, p. 4.

¹⁶⁶Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mamräča Derejit Wäzadär Ačər...", pp. 4-5; Bahru Zewde, "Environment and Capital: Notes...", p. 135; Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union, *Wonji ena Tegleu No.1 Tir, 1970*, p. 6; Regassa, p. 73.

succeeded to form a new *edder* to challenge and weaken the general *edder* and the labour union. The group of workers who established the new *edder* with the tacit support of the management were referred to as "*Čombist*" (after the Congolese secessionist leader Moise Thombe), as opposed to the group of workers who founded the labour union and named as "*Lumumbist*" (after the nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba). This division created havoc among the workers of Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate.¹⁶⁷

The legalization of the labour union was not, however, yet achieved. Even though the emperor expressed his consent verbally for the committee members and recognized their right to organize a labour union, and the committee also publicized it to its members, the registration process faced serious problems in the Ministry of Interior. For instance, in the letter written to the Ministry of Interior Public Security Department on 24 August 1962, the committee members of the covert labour union expressed that the workers were tired of requesting the Ministry to get legal recognition for their association.¹⁶⁸ In the meantime, however, the leaders began to contact Mesfin Wolde Mariam, a professor in Addis Ababa University and Doctor Bereket Habte Selassie, the attorney general in the imperial Ethiopian Government. These two scholars introduced Abräham Mäkonän to other industrial *edder* leaders in Addis Ababa and began an organized labour movement in the country. Moreover, the leaders of the covert labour union began also to get support from the local authorities like Gëtačäw Mädhanë, the governor of Yärär and Käräyu *Awraja*.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mamräča Derejit Wäzadär Ačer...", p. 6; Bahru Zewde, "Environment and Capital: Notes...", p. 135.

¹⁶⁸Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union, Folder No-file No. 5. A letter written from the committee members of the covert labour union to the Ministry of Interior on 18 *Nähäse* 1954 EC or 24 August 1962.

¹⁶⁹Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mamräča Derejit Wäzadär Ačer...", p. 6; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät ...*, p. 43.

The success of the Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate workers' movement could be attributed to their militancy and the general policy shift of the imperial Ethiopian state in the 1960s. For instance, it was because of the militancy of workers that the leader of the labour union was reinstated after he was fired by the management following the March 1961 agreement. Despite the divisive management strategies, the leaders of the covert labour union worked relentlessly to address the demands of member workers. As a result, it was able to secure support from both the permanent and seasonal workers. This enabled the leaders of the covert labour union to continue their relationship with other labour groups in Addis Ababa and pressurized the government to issue the first labour relation decree on 5 September 1962. Accordingly, the Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Estates Workers' Union received legal status three months later.¹⁷⁰

1.2.3. The Ethiopian Fiber Factory Workers' Union

As happened to many Ethiopian factory workers, the Ethiopian fiber factory workers were exploited by the management. For instance, they were forced to work for more than 10 hours a day for meager wages and under poor working and living conditions. They were also paid only an average of E\$ 0.5 to 1.70 per day.¹⁷¹ Workers were not allowed to get annual leave, maternity leave, insurance, payment for overtime and severance pay. Moreover, Charles Neish, the manager of the company, abused workers personally and fired them whenever they showed resentment against him.¹⁷²

Ethiopian fiber factory workers were able to establish *edder* to help one another under the leadership of Abära Gämu, an old and respected Kāmbatan, on 12 October 1958. The formation

¹⁷⁰Bahru Zewde, "Environment and Capital: Notes...", p. 135; Regassa, p.73.

¹⁷¹Abiyu, p. 29; Richard Pankhurst, "The Industrialization of Ethiopia," *Ethiopian Observer...*, p. 165.

¹⁷²Yä Mälaw Ityopiya Särätäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Ityopiya Särätäñoč...", p. 37; Abiyu, p. 29.

of *edder* enabled them to support member workers in times of illness, death, marriage and dismissal from work. The *edder* could not, however, address all the intricate and wide ranging problems that the workers were facing in the factory. True, it enhanced the solidarity of workers and helped them to present their demands both to the management and the emperor.¹⁷³

The manager of the factory was indifferent to workers' demands. Workers who complained against the management were often intimidated and if they could not refrain from such acts they would be automatically fired. When the workers were unable to get response for their demands from the management, they stopped work and went to the palace to submit their petition to the emperor in late 1960. While the government was investigating their problems, a coup d'état was attempted on the emperor in December 1960 and the workers' demands was stalled.¹⁷⁴

Abära and his colleagues then tried to form alliance with other *edders* to enhance the fund for laid-off workers and also to strengthen the pressure on the management and the state and get their demands heard. Nevertheless, the national self-help association could not work as expected and the working and living conditions of the Ethiopian workers in general and the Ethiopian fiber workers in particular remained precarious.¹⁷⁵

In the meantime, the Ethiopian Fiber Factory workers went on strike. It started on 19 October 1961 and ended on 12 November 1961. On the second day of the strike, the strikers closed the gate of the factory and denied the manager, Charles Neish and his supporters' entry into the

¹⁷³Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär,"Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč ...," p. 38; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät ...*, pp. 28-29; Abiyu, p. 30.

¹⁷⁴Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär,"Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč...", p. 38; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät ...*, p. 28

¹⁷⁵Informants: Gämäču Nägaše, Gälätaw Felatè and Fäkadu Amänjo.

compound. Consequently, the manager and his supporters clashed with the strikers and around 13 workers, most of them from the manager's group, were seriously injured. The conflict was stopped with the intervention of a joint force from the regular police force and the special army. Despite the control of the conflict, the strike continued until the 19th October 1961. The police also discovered that other workers from fifteen different factories were ready to follow suit and express their resentment through strike.¹⁷⁶ The conflict, however, continued outside the premises of the factory and some of the key supporters of the manager were severely beaten by the strikers. Consequently, the police arrested three individuals including Tadässä Negusè, Negussè Gärbrä Ṭadiq and Abatä Täšomä and sentenced each to six months imprisonment. This created division among the Ethiopian factory workers. The Hädeya and Kāmbata workers led by the chairman of the *edder*, Abära Gämu formed one group and stood against another group which was largely composed of Oromo. This division affected the solidarity of workers for some time.¹⁷⁷

At the end of the strike, the government and the board of directors of the Sabean Utility Corporation recognized the plight of the workers and fired the manager and the government expelled him from the country within 24hrs. In addition, some of the demands of workers were met. Among others, the Ethiopian fiber factory workers were able to secure annual leave of 14 to 25 days depending on their years of service, maternity leave for a month of which 15 days were paid, and working hours were reduced from 10 hrs to 8 hrs per day. Above all, the workers were

¹⁷⁶IES/MS 2992, A Letter sent from the 2nd Brigade of the Imperial Body Guard to the head quarter of the Imperial Body Guard Division on 11 *Ṭeqemet* 1954 or 21 October 1961.

¹⁷⁷Abiyu, p. 31.

satisfied with the removal of the expatriate manager. It inspired them to act in unison in the future.¹⁷⁸

Having the expatriate manager removed and some of their demands addressed, the leaders of the Ethiopian fiber factory *edder* continued to strengthen the cooperative movement which was in decline together with the Franco-Ethiopian workers' union and other factory *edders*. In the mean time, however, some scholars both from the state bureaucracy and Addis Ababa University contacted them and expressed their willingness to support and guide them. This was the turning point in Abära's cooperative movement. It was no longer used as a way to form a national workers organization. The Ethiopian Workers' Mutual Assistance Cooperative Syndicate was; rather transformed into a covert national labour unions (Ethiopian Labour Unions). The contact was first started between Mesfin Wolde Mariam, who had been hearing the plight of the Ethiopian workers in Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate for a long time from his friend, Gëtačäw Mädhanè, the governor of Yärär and Käräu *Awraja*, and Abräham Mäkonän, the leader of the covert labour unions in Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate. The governor was considered as progressive by the workers because he knew their miserable state very well and worked with them to address those problems. For instance, he worked hand in hand with the 13 committee members to avoid workers' casualties and to address their demands peacefully. He discussed with the committee members about the inhuman treatment that the workers faced in the hands of the Dutch management. Consequently, irritated by the appalling conditions of workers, the authorities of

¹⁷⁸Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč...", p. 39.

the surrounding area began to change their mind and to encourage the workers, especially, after the March 1961 strike.¹⁷⁹

Having discussed the appalling conditions of workers in Wonji-Šäwa with Abreham, Mesfin Wolde Mariam approached Bereket Habte Selassie and began to work together to help and guide workers in their struggle against the employers and the state. In doing so, Bereket managed to get Beyene Solomon, one of the founders of the cooperative movement of workers in Addis Ababa through Habtäab Bayru, a worker in the Ministry of Trade and Industry and who had acquaintance with many active workers when they came to appeal to the Ministry. Beyene Solomon, who was working in the heavy freight transport, brought other workers who were in the cooperative movement and worked to push the cooperative further into a covert national labour union. The two scholars brought Abreham and introduced him to the representatives of the cooperative movement including Abära Gämu, Šikurālah Yusuf, Beyene Solomon, Assāfa Wäldä Maryam, Abära Abäbä, Ayälä Wäldäyäs, Wärqu Dämessè and Däjänè Mäkonnan on 1 July 1962. The representatives of the cooperative syndicate welcomed the scholars wholeheartedly and were encouraged by their support. In the meeting, the attorney general also notified the workers that the government was working to issue a labour decree which would be advantageous for them to get organized in advance.¹⁸⁰

In their second meeting which was held after a week on 8 July 1962, the scholars expressed to the workers that they came to give advice and guide them in their struggle against the employers and the state to defend their right. They met in an old quarry outside Diabaco Cotton Factory in

¹⁷⁹Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mamräča Derejit Wäzadär Ačər...", pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁰Abära Abäbä, "Yä Mosevold Säratäñoč Anäsas," A Personal account, 1996, 1;IES/MS 3818, p. 3; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Ityopiya Säratäñoč Andenät ...*, p. 45.

the vicinity of Addis Ababa and at the end of the meeting, the scholars warned the participants not to tell anybody that the meeting had taken place with them. On the other hand, they took responsibility to prepare a new regulation for the workers' organization by adapting and translating the regulation of the Kenyan Labour Federation. The coming of these scholars further emboldened workers to strengthen their solidarity and to fight for their right. They also opened the door for the Ethiopian workers to establish relationship with the African American Labour Center (AALC), American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). In addition to the scholars, the militancy of the workers of Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate and the leadership skill of Abreham Mäkonnan changed the momentum of the cooperative movement into a purely labour movement.¹⁸¹

Regarding the role of the scholars in the formation of national workers' organizations or labour unions in Ethiopia, for instance, Abreham noted that:

...እኛ ደንቆሮች ብንሆንም ለድህው ህዝብ ተቆርቋሪ የሆኑ ምሁራን ስላጋጠሙን እኛ እንዴት ልንጠነክር እንደምንችልና የሌሎች ድርጅት ሰራተኞችንም ተገናኝተን ለመቀስቀስና ለማስተባበር እንድንችል ጭላንጭሉን አሳዩን፤ በሀሳብም መሩን፤ በዚህ መንገድ ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ ከ እኔ ቀጥሎ የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች ማህበር ፕሬዝዳንት የነበሩትን አቶ በዩነ ሰለሞንን ሰው አስተዋወቀን እና እኛም ተመካከረን አዲስ አበባ ውስጥና በእየጠቅላይ ግዛቱ የሚገኙትን የድርጅት ሰራተኞች እንዴት እየተገናኙ እንደምናስተባበር ዘዴ ፈለግን፤ በዚህም ጊዜ እኔ አስቀድሜ ያልተረዳሁት እንቅስቃሴ መኖሩን ሰማሁ።¹⁸²

...Though we were ignorant, we found scholars who were sympathetic to the poor people and provided us new ideas and ways on how to approach and get workers from various organizations organized. In doing so, somebody introduced me with Mr. Beyene Solomon who later succeeded me as president of the Confederation of the Ethiopian Labour Unions. Thereafter, we discussed on the ways to organize workers in Addis Ababa and the provinces. At this stage I heard the existence of another labour movement in the country that I did not realize it before.

¹⁸¹Abära Abäbä, "Yä Mosevold Särätäñoč Anäsas," A Personal Record, 1996, p.1; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Särätäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Särätäñoč...", p.47; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Särätäñoče Andenät ...*, p. 47.

¹⁸²IES/MS 3818, p. 3.

In the meantime, however, the workers discovered that the scholars had come with their own hidden agenda. They further noted that the scholars came not merely to help them but rather they wanted to use workers' organization to gain personal benefit and as a weapon against the government, and to bring a change in government. For instance Abrahām put the conspiracy made by some of the scholars as follows:

...አንዳንድ በግልና በመንግስት ሥራ ላይ የሚገኙ ሰዎች ለኛ ወዳጅና ቀራቢ ተቆርቋሪ መስለው እኛን ወክለው በመስራት ከልዩልዩ የውጭ ድርጅቶች ዕርዳታ ሰብስበው በዚያ ለመጠቀም እኛም /የማህበሩ አቋም/ ማለት ነው የነርሱ ፓርቲና ደጋፊ ወይም ጥገኛ እንድንሆን ያሰቡና የሞከሩም ነበሩ። በዘርና በጎሳ ስሜትም እያስታከኩ ወዳጅ መስለው ጠላት በመሆን እኛን እርስበርስ ለመከፋፈልና የራሳቸውን ዕምነት ተከታይ ለመተካት ውስጡን ዝግጅት እንደነበራቸው አውቅ ነበር። የሰራተኞች ማህበር በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ መቋቋም ወደፊት የመንግስት ለውጥ ተደርጎ የፖለቲካ ፓርቲዎች ሲቋቋሙ በመሳሪያነት ስለሚያገለግል ካሁኑ በልዩ ልዩ ዘዴ አስጠግተው እንያዛቸው ብለው የሚሸቀዱትም ነበሩ።¹⁸³

...Some individuals who were employed both in governmental and private organizations attempted to get benefit from foreign organizations on behalf of the labour union and make us subordinate to their ideology. I also knew that they were preparing to approach labour unions members through ethnic and tribal affiliations and work as enemy to create division amongst us and replace us with their supporters. There were also individuals who tried to control the labour unions systematically merely to use it as a weapon to create a party after regime change.

Supporting Abreham's account, Beyene also argued that the scholars were not interested only in helping and guiding workers' struggle but also they conspired to create an organized body which would serve as a center whenever a movement for regime change started. He further noted that "...እነዚህ ምሁራን ለሰራተኞች መብት ለመከራከር ወይም ሰራተኞችን ለመርዳት የተነሳሱ ሳይሆኑ በኢትዮጵያ ሁነኛ የአስተዳደር ለውጥ ለማምጣት የተደራጀና አንድነቱን የጠበቀ ሰራተኛን ለዕቅዳቸው ማሳኪያነት ብቻ ለመጠቀም ያሰቡ ነበሩ።"¹⁸⁴ The workers' blame on the scholars was not entirely groundless because they approached them right after the

¹⁸³IES/MS 3818, p. 6.
¹⁸⁴"...These scholars were not motivated to defend workers' right and help them; rather they sought to use organized and united labour unions as a weapon to fulfill their plan of bringing an administrative change in Ethiopia." See also Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñöč Andenät ...*, p. 46.

attempted 1960 coup d'état. True, not only scholars but also other Ethiopians in different walks of life were inspired by the coup and agitated for change. But, Mesfin did not buy the workers' blame. Nevertheless, as the workers did, Mesfin suspected that Bereket might have worked to that end. He further noted that Bereket took \$500 sent from AFL-CIO for the confederation and also agitated Eritrean workers to control the leadership.¹⁸⁵ Even though I could not find Bereket's response to prove what has been claimed by Mesfin, in his memoir, Bereket noted that his serious contact with Ethiopian workers started when he was commissioned by the government to examine the complaints of the railway workers in late 1957. He further added that:

...I visited every railway station from Addis Ababa, through Dire Dawa, to as far as Dewelle, on Djibouti border, interviewing as many workers as time allowed. Before I set out, I met the General Manager M.Auriot, who presented the company's side by dismissing the workers complaints as immaterial. When I began asking some hard questions, he realized that I was not impressed shifted ground. In a word, he made a subtle offer of a bribe. I remember saying "Monsieur le directeur, je suis vraiment surpris de vous entendre dire cela." (Sir, I am really surprised to hear you say that.) I then got up, shook his hand and left briskly."¹⁸⁶

From this account one can deduce that Mesfin's claim on Bereket might not be alleged.

After the second meeting, the workers directly went to the office of the cooperative which was virtually closed after the two employees had resigned three months earlier and the house rent was three months in arrears too. Thus, they contributed money and paid their debt and continued to use the office for meeting. In the meantime, the scholars finished drafting the regulations and gave them to the workers to organize a national labour union. As a result, the regulation was ratified and as per the new regulation, *Yä Iteyopia Säratäoče Yä Sera ena Yä Hebrät Mahebär* or Ethiopian Workers' Development and Cooperative Syndicate was transformed into *Yä Iteyopia*

¹⁸⁵Informants: Mesfin Wolde Mariam and Abreham Mäkonän.

¹⁸⁶ Bereket Habte Selassie, *The Crown and the Pen: The Memoirs of a Lawyer Turned Rebel* (Asmara: The Red Sea Press Inc., 2007), p. 170.

Säratäoč Yä Hebrät Derejit Mahebär or Ethiopian Workers' Mutual Association Syndicate or later called Ethiopian Labour Unions [ELU] on 15 July 1962. On the same day, officials of the confederation were elected. Accordingly, while Abära Gämu was made honorary president, Abreham Mäkonän was elected as president and Beyene Solomon became secretary-general. Moreover, Dämäna Lamma was elected as vice president and Däjänè Mäkonän and Šikurālah Yusuf as treasurer and vice treasurer and Abära Abäbä as auditor. After a week, the president and the secretary accompanied by some other officials went to the Ministry of Trade and Industry to submit their regulations and get the ELU registered. However, *Lej Endalkačäw* Mäkonän told them that they should submit it to the MNCD which was responsible to deal with issues of labour. Even though the officials of the Ministry, including the Minister, Gètahun Täsämma, accepted their application, they did not officially register it; rather they told them to continue establishing workers' organization at factory level until the government issued a labour decree. Thus, the leaders of the confederation began to develop a regulation for local unions and initiated them to get organized. On 29 July 1962, they called workers' representatives from various factories and discussed on how they could conduct election as per the regulation developed to organize workers' union at factory level. Thus, before the issuance of the labour decree on 5 September 1962, workers were already organized at factory level and set up a national labour union which was later elevated to a confederation.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratänoč Andenät* ...,pp. 48-49; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratänoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratänoč...", p. 51.

1.3. The Growth of State Engagement with Workers' Organizations

Although Ethiopia had been a member of the International Labour Organization (ILO) since 1923, it did not yet legalize freedom of association and recognize the formation of labour unions until the issuance of Decree No. 49/1962. Since the imperial government did not allow employees and employers to establish their own organizations until the early 1960s, Ethiopia had never been fully represented in various ILO assemblies for nearly 40 years. Despite its membership, Ethiopia was not interested to ratify the ILO's conventions in the years between 1923 and 1963. It took a long time to establish labour institutions that could govern labour relations and labour unions that could defend the interest of workers in the country.¹⁸⁸

The government did not legalize freedom of association apparently because it feared that associations, more importantly labour unions, could emerge as potential political forces in the country. Moreover, since most of the officials in the ruling class had their own interest in the industry, they were not willing to introduce significant reforms concerning labour. As a result, at the beginning, labour and management were left alone with no government interference. The imperial Ethiopian government stayed aloof from getting involved in labour relations. What was good to the management was simply taken for granted by the government.¹⁸⁹ The government intervened only when law and order were disrupted as a result of industrial discontent. Strikes and work stoppages were regarded as serious crimes committed against the imperial Ethiopian government. Workers were not allowed to form any organization in defense of their rights and interests, including labour unions, which were identified with strikes and other workers'

¹⁸⁸ *Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, April 9, 1970, p. 13; Desta, p. 136.

¹⁸⁹ Getachew Araya, "Labour Movements in Ethiopia," A Seminar Paper presented to the Department of Business Administration, 1963, in Students' Paper Miscellanea, p. 8; Hess, p.81.

movements.¹⁹⁰ This created an opportunity for employers to recruit cheap, helpless, submissive and unorganized workers who could be treated as commodities. Consequently, labour was severely exploited by management and this eventually resulted in the development of a master-servant kind of relationship between management and labour. Workers were used when they were strong and in good health and kicked out when they showed a decline or loss of their strength and energy. The government was virtually indifferent as the employers exploited workers and developed a master-servant kind of relations between them. The employers had full power to hire and fire workers whenever they wanted to do so. They had also the freedom to use workers for long hours of toil at barely subsistence level of payment, and secure quick and enormous wealth.¹⁹¹ Needless to say, the government did nothing to ameliorate the precarious conditions of workers and change the backward labour relations in the country. As a result, the master-servant kind of relationship of labour and management characterized Ethiopian industry until the early 1960s.

True, the imperial Ethiopian government guaranteed workers the right to express their grievances through petitions to government officials including the emperor since 1931. Article 28 of the 1931 constitution stated that: "...All Ethiopian subjects have the right to present to the government petitions in legal form."¹⁹² Thus, workers often carried the flag of the country and travelled to the palace to submit their petition to the emperor and get their demands addressed. In addition, in 1944, the government introduced some legal measures that could at least show its intention to improve labour relations in the country. This was particularly reflected in the

¹⁹⁰Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1991: From a Monarchical Autocracy to a Military Oligarchy* (London; New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997), p. 63.

¹⁹¹Berhane Gebre Negus, "Labour Relations Decree (September, 1962): Possible Impact on Labour and Management," BA Thesis, Haile Selassie I University: Department of Economics, 1964, p. 4.

¹⁹²The 1931 Constitution.

promulgation of Proclamation No.58/1944 to supervise factories and improve the overall conditions of workers. The proclamation enabled the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to issue regulations to protect labour in the factories. It also stipulated the establishment of Factories' Board consisting of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Director General of medical services of apparently the same Ministry, and an engineer appointed by the Ministry. The board was given the power to supervise all factories, and machineries in the country to make rules concerning health, safety of factory workers, prevention of factory accidents, regulation of hours of work, determining salary scale and maintaining the security of workers etc.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, the proclamation did not explicitly recognize workers' right to freedom of association. Even though it did not mention freedom of association and workers' right to form organizations, it indicated that the government was well aware of the problem of workers and began to take the initiative to ameliorate their precarious conditions. It also marked the beginning of the government's conscious move to address workers' problems. On the part of the workers, although they faced difficult working conditions and were trying to complain individually or in groups to the management of their respective factories and to government authorities including the emperor; they were not yet aware of the right to freedom of association.

The Franco-Ethiopian Railway workers, for instance, began to demand the right to freedom of association in 1946 following the issuance of the factory proclamation. Even though the imperial Ethiopian government did not recognize the workers' right to form labour unions, it expressed its sympathy to them as they raised nationalist concerns like Ethiopianization of the management. It was, for instance, reported that the emperor supported the Franco-Ethiopian workers from his personal treasury during the two months strike in 1947. Thus, one can argue that workers had

¹⁹³*Nägarit Gazëtta*, Proclamation No. 58 of 1944, 29th April, 1944.

begun to demand the right to freedom of association since the end of the 1940s. Despite the development of workers' consciousness of freedom of association, employers continued to treat them with distrust and contempt. As a result, workers often marched to petition both the local authorities and the emperor whenever they faced serious problems in their work places.¹⁹⁴

The 1955 revised constitution also testified to the imperial Ethiopian government's endeavor to recognize workers' right to freedom of association. Like the provision crafted in Article 28 of the 1931 constitution, Article 63 of the 1955 revised constitution guaranteed workers the right to petition the government. In this constitution, workers were also guaranteed freedom of association. Article 47 of the constitution, for instance, asserted that "...Every Ethiopian subject has the right to engage in any occupation and, to that end, to join or, form associations in accordance with the law." In fact, the provision did not specifically recognize the formation of labour unions, but it vaguely allowed every worker to join or form any association. The provision mainly encouraged workers to establish self-help associations like *edder* or *märädaja* in the factory where no legally recognized labour union was formed. It also allowed every citizen to choose his/her occupation freely and to join associations 'in accordance with the law'. Presumably, for fear of the last sentence, workers were unable to push their demand beyond establishing a self-help association.¹⁹⁵ Prior to the issuance of the civil code in 1960, though a number of self-help associations were established in various factories, they remained officially unregistered. The leaders of the associations did not know the criteria to be fulfilled for registration and even where to be registered.¹⁹⁶ Regardless of its ambiguity in recognizing

¹⁹⁴ Killion, p. 402.

¹⁹⁵ The Revised Constitution of 1955.

¹⁹⁶ Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions Concerned with Labor Relations in Ethiopia," A Teaching Material, Haile Selassie I University: Department of Public Administration, 1969, 15.

workers' right to form labour unions, however, the provision legalized freedom of association for the first time in the history of the country.

The civil code of 1960 was also another important legislation which incorporated several articles regarding workers' right to freedom of association. As compared to the 1944 factory proclamation and the 1955 constitution, the civil code of 1960 gave much emphasis to labour relations. Section 5 and 6 of Article 451-482 of the civil code discussed the right and obligation of workers' associations and their dissolution and liquidation.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, Article 479 clearly indicated where associations would be registered. It stated that: “ያገር ግዛት ሚኒስቴር የማኅበሮች ጽፈትቤቶች በማኅበሮች ላይ እርግጠኛ የሆነውን የመቆጣጠር ሥራ እንዲሠሩ ለማድረግ ሌሎችንም ጠቃሚነት ያላቸውን ጥንቃቄዎች ሁሉ በሚገኙት ሕጎች መሰረት ለማዘዝ ይችላል።”¹⁹⁸ Moreover, Articles 2512 to 2593 of the provision also discussed the formation of contracts, the duties of the employee and employer, wages due to the employee and the termination of contracts.¹⁹⁹

More importantly, Article 406 sub article 1 and 2 of the provision defined labour unions and envisaged the necessity of a special legislation to further strengthen them in the foreseeable future. It defined labour unions as follows:

...የአባሎቻቸውን የገንዘብ ጥቅም ለመከላከል ወይም ላንድ ለተወሰነ የሙያ ሥራ እንዲራሱ ለመሆን የተቋቋሙ ስብሰባዎች፤ የሙያ ሥራ ማኅበራት (ሰንደካዎች) በሚመለከቱ ልዩ ሕጎች የሚመሩ ናቸው። ... እነርሱን የሚመለከቱ ልዩ ሕጎች ባይኖሩም እነዚህ ስብሰባዎች እንደ ተራ ማህበር ተገምተው በዚህ ምዕራፍ ሕጋዊያን ደንቦች የሚመሩ ይሆናሉ።²⁰⁰

...Groupings or labour unions (syndicate) formed with a view to defending the financial interest of their members or to represent a particular occupation shall be

¹⁹⁷Nägarit Gazetà, *Civil Code of the Imperial Ethiopian Government*, Proclamation No.165 of 1960, pp. 94-101. The English translation of Article 479 can be put as "The Ministry of Interior may prescribe, within the framework of the existing laws, and other measures it thinks fit with a view to placing the offices of associations in a position to exercise an efficient control on the associations."

¹⁹⁸*Ibid*, p. 101.

¹⁹⁹*Ibid*, pp. 530-549.

²⁰⁰*Ibid*, p. 86.

subject to special laws. However,... in the absence of special such laws, they shall be subject to the provisions of this chapter.

Though the government regarded labour unions as ordinary associations and decided to control them through the laws provided for such associations as stipulated in the provision, it expressed the necessity of introducing special laws specifically to govern the functions of labour unions. It also helped the workers and their associations to take their case to the court and to present their petitions to government officials including the emperor. Moreover, the civil code formed the basis on which the subsequent labour relations decree of 1962 that recognized the formation of labour unions was based. Despite a guarantee of freedom of association to the workers under the two legislations, the 1955 revised constitution and the civil code of 1960, the government did not recognize labour unions until the early 1960s. Since the early 1960s, however, the attitude of the government towards labour organizations changed significantly and it eventually recognized labour unions in 1962. Although the government finally decided to recognize labour unions, it must be realized that, it took a very long time to do so, and even then, it was because of some endogenous and exogenous pressures that the government was forced to recognize labour unions.²⁰¹

1.3.1. Endogenous Factors

The internal pressures emanated from the workers themselves, their mutual aid associations, and some concerned Ethiopian scholars who were working in the state bureaucracy and in Addis Ababa University. Workers often struggled individually and in groups against the management for better pay and working conditions. They had also already established self-help associations

²⁰¹Getachew, p. 8.

and this in turn already strengthened their solidarity. As shown above, these associations were eventually transformed into covert labour unions by demanding workers' economic concerns. Thus, the impetus of workers' and their associations' struggle for better working conditions, pay and legal recognition of labour unions pressurized the government to change its policy towards labour. Scholars also believed that the formation of labour unions would improve the precarious living and working conditions of workers in the country. Thus, they agitated workers to intensify their struggle to that end.

Until the late 1950s, the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers movement was the only noteworthy protest of workers in Ethiopia. With the expansion of industries in and around Addis Ababa, however, the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers' movement served as a role model for workers in other parts of the country to express their discontent with management and government officials. The struggle of workers for better pay and better working conditions picked momentum around the end of the 1950s. More importantly, the latent workers' interest in the formation of labour unions unfolded in the aftermath of the 1960 attempted coup d'état. The workers' movement augmented by the introduction of a planned economy in the country further pushed the government to introduce policy changes towards labour which in turn contributed a lot to the subsequent development of labour institutions including labour unions in Ethiopia.²⁰²

The abortive coup of 1960 played an important role in initiating the popular masses to agitate against the long reigning monarch. It was very decisive in discrediting the regime in the eyes of the popular masses, including workers, students and other civil servants. The attempted coup d'état of 1960 was interestingly perceived by the society including workers as a beacon of change

²⁰²Tefera, p. 88; Gebre Negus, p. 7.

that enlightened and encouraged them to challenge the imperial government in subsequent years. It also marked the beginning of democratic opposition from below. It also gave an impetus to mass protests from all walks of life.²⁰³ For instance, in the immediate aftermath of the coup, popular groups from all walks of life started to sympathize with the rebels' cause. On the other hand, the attempted coup also awakened the government to introduce reforms affecting major labour issues to mitigate any similar attempt against the government in the future.²⁰⁴ This has pushed some scholars to argue that the imperial government's policy change towards labour in the early 1960s was not mainly made to modernize labour relations; rather it was merely done as a survival strategy.²⁰⁵

Even though the workers did not go out on strike in support of the rebels like the students, they were highly inspired and encouraged by their deeds and afterwards began to express their demands to government officials through mass demonstrations. This was clearly observed in the immediate aftermath of the coup when a number of workers in several factories went out on strike. Consequently, the government labeled the leaders of the strike and militant workers as sympathizers of the rebels and began to intimidate and harass them. For instance, the government infiltrated security personnel inside the Wonji-Šäwa sugar factory suspecting that the strike was instigated by members of the imperial body guard who had been active participants in the attempted coup.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Addis, p.93; Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*, p. 88; Andargachew Tiruneh, pp. 29-30 Bahru, *A History of Modern...*, p. 211.

²⁰⁴ Tekeste, p. 207.

²⁰⁵ Bereket Habte Selassie, *The Crown and the Pen: The Memoirs ...*, p. 145.

²⁰⁶ IES/MS 3818, p. 2.

Regardless of the government intimidation and crackdown, however, workers continued to go out on strike demanding an end to the brutal management system of the Dutch company. They, for instance, carried out a strike from 26-28 March 1961 and demanded better pay and working conditions. The problem was resolved after the Ministry of Commerce and Industry sent three top officials, who discussed with the representatives of the workers and agreed to some major reforms on labour.²⁰⁷ During late 1961 and early 1962, workers struck at the new Indo-Ethiopian textile plant in Akaki. The workers expressed their resentment against the management and sought to raise the low wages and improve the bad working conditions through a series of strikes.²⁰⁸

Likewise, the workers of Darmär shoe factory, the Bole Airport, and road transport enterprises held a strike against their respective management around the end of 1961.²⁰⁹ Even though some of these strikes were quelled through the violent intervention of the security forces, they further pressurized the government to hasten its decision to legally recognize workers' organizations as a means of controlling the emerging labour movement. Moreover, the strikes brought workers from different factories to get to know each other and led to a practical move to establish a national workers' organization in 1961. Nevertheless, during the years between 1960 and 1962 workers' organizations in Ethiopia were governed by the regulation of association.²¹⁰ After the successive Franco-Ethiopian railway workers' strikes staged in the late 1940s there was no notable workers' protest in the country for about a decade. Thus, one can say that around a decade passed before there was another outbreak of labour unrest in Ethiopia. In late 1961 and

²⁰⁷IES/MS 2992; Wonji-Šawa Sugar Factory Workers' Union, "Yä Wonji Sekuar Mamrača Derejit Wäzadär Ačer...", p. 3.

²⁰⁸IES/MS 2992; Bekele, p. 48.

²⁰⁹Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Săratăñoč Andenăt ...*, p. 50.

²¹⁰Stutz, p. 41; Arnold Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops in Ethiopia," Boston University, *Papers on Africa*, 1968, pp. 104-105.

early 1962, however, a series of strikes and demonstrations occurred in Addis Ababa and its environs. For instance, the construction workers at the new Bole International Airport, workers at the HVA-Ethiopia Share Company, the Darmar Shoe factory, the Indo-Ethiopian Textile Share Company and the Truck and Taxi drivers in Addis Ababa took actions to protest against their low wages or poor working conditions.²¹¹

The other internal pressure which forced the government to give due attention to labour matters including labour unions emanated from some enlightened bureaucrats in the Ministries of Commerce and Industry, National Community Development and scholars in Addis Ababa University.²¹² Encouraged by the abortive 1960 coup, those individuals tried to initiate and encourage workers to organize and defend their interest. In this regard, Mäsfen Wäldä Maryam and Bereket Habte Selassie played an important role in the formation of labour unions. In addition, Seyum Gebre Egziabher and Germa Amarä, Ambassador Emeru Zäläqä, Häbtäb Bayru, Gëtačäw Mädhänè from the Ministry of Community Development contributed a lot to the organization of workers.²¹³ For instance, scholars organized different seminars in cooperation with international labour organizations to develop the awareness of workers concerning labour relations. The CELU was also organized after a seminar was delivered to the workers by ICFTU experts and scholars from Addis Ababa University.

In addition to a series of workers' strike demanding legally recognized labour unions, the policy changes introduced by the imperial Ethiopian government also contributed a lot to the formation of such labour unions in the country. The government had already begun a planned economy by

²¹¹Stutz, p. 37.

²¹²Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*, p. 63.

²¹³Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät ...*, p. 45.

launching the First Five Year Plan (FFYP) in 1957. The FFYP covered the period from 1957 to 1961. The plan showed not only the policy change brought by the government but also its commitment to undertake a program of national planning for economic and social development for the first time in the history of the country.²¹⁴

During the First Five Year Plan (FFYP), although the primary emphasis was on the development of the infrastructure necessary for economic development, cement factories, oil refineries, textile factories, hydroelectric dams and a number of service industries were established. The establishment of these industries in turn required considerable additional labour force of various occupations and skill.²¹⁵ On the other hand, the growing number of workers in the FFYP created very serious struggle in labour relations. Consequently, the industrial production began to be affected by a series of strikes. It was at this time that the government began to realize the need for regulation of labour matters to solve the hurdles to industrial production. More importantly, in the Second Five Year Plan (1963-1967), the government gave formal recognition to the need for labour legislation to mitigate the problems observed in the FFYP. It stated that:

...With economic development, labour legislation gains increasing significance, as more people are employed labour relations become more complex, and consequently should be legally regulated. Steady employment is not only a present day social demand but also a condition for achieving skill and qualification as well as more efficient work. It is, therefore, necessary to enact laws which will regulate the right and obligations of the workers and employers.²¹⁶

Above all, the government also began to express its own desire to put an end to the industrial disputes that were brewing in almost all enterprises. During the first five year development plan

²¹⁴Imperial Ethiopian Government, *The First Five Year Development Plan, 1957-1961* (Addis Ababa: 1957), p. 2.

²¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

²¹⁶Imperial Ethiopian Government, *The Second Five Year Development Plan, 1963-1967* (Addis Ababa October, 1962), p. 293.

period a number of work stoppages and some lock-outs were observed. Evidently, these were obstacles to fast economic development which had to be rectified before the second plan period started. Thus, the proclamation was the result of a well thought out plan to create harmonious and prosperous labour relations which would foster a steady economic development.²¹⁷ Thus, I argue that the decline in industrial production observed at the end of the FFYP as a result of a series of workers' strikes forced the government to realize the necessity of a comprehensive labour legislation to regulate labour relations in the country. The enactment of the labour law not only regulated the labour relations but also recognized workers' right to freedom of association to the extent of establishing labour unions.

Moreover, the growth of the government's commitment towards labour matters was also witnessed with the establishment of the Ministry of National Community Development (MNCD) under Order No. 15 of 1957.²¹⁸ True, the Ministry of Work was one of the first ministries instituted in the country by Emperor Menilek II on 26 October 1907.²¹⁹ Nevertheless, at that time, it was designed mainly to carry out bridge and road construction, and to create awareness among the people about the value of work. The question of labour relations had never been given due attention by the Ministry for long time. Labour problems had been managed merely by ad hoc committees which were often set up by the emperor or by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry whenever grievances were presented to the government. It was only in 1957 with the establishment of the MNCD that the government began to incorporate labour relations as a major focus area of the Ministry.²²⁰ The creation of the Department of Labour Relations in the MNCD under order No. 15/1957 on 29 January 1957 further initiated workers to struggle for their right.

²¹⁷Imperial Ethiopian Government, *The Second Five Year Development Plan...*, p. 377; Gebre Negus, p.8.

²¹⁸*Nägarit Gazèta*, Order No. 15 of 1957.

²¹⁹Mahteme Selassie Wolde Mesqel, *Zekrä Nägär...*, p. 54.

²²⁰*Nägarit Gazèta*, Order No. 15 of 1957, 29th January 1957.

Thus, I argue that the establishment of the labour department in the Ministry can be taken as one of the manifestations of government's endeavor to ameliorate labour relations in the country.

The impetus of government's endeavor towards labour was clearly manifested when the newly established Ministry organized and conducted a seminar on industrial relations, man power and employment services from August to October 1962. The seminar was organized to provide officials employed in various government offices and who were expected to assume responsibilities for labour affairs. It was conducted by experts from the International Labour Organization and scholars from Haile Selassie I University. The seminar encompassed various labour and labour related issues including the constitution and government of Ethiopia, labour management, the new labour legislation and administration and the Ethiopian economy with special reference to labour.²²¹ The seminar confirmed the inevitability of a labour relation decree in the foreseeable future. Indeed, while the seminar was going on, the government passed the labour relations decree on 5 September 1962, the legislation that granted the formation of labour unions.

Likewise, the existence of a strong labour movement in Eritrea triggered the Ethiopian government to issue the labour relations decree of 1962. The Eritrean labour movement had its genesis during the Italian colonial period (1890-1941) and it showed significant development during the British administration (1941-1952) when workers began to enjoy the right to freedom of association.²²² After Eritrea became autonomous as a result of the federation proclamation on

²²¹Ministry of National Community Development, *Seminar on Industrial Relations, Manpower and Employment Services, August-October, 1962*, p. 1; Tamrat, pp.25-26

²²²Fitsum Gebre Giyorgis and Luchien Karsten, "The Dynamics of Industrial Relations in Eritrea, 1991-2006," in Geoffrey Wood and Chris Brewster (ed.) *Industrial Relations in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 22.

11 September 1952, labour unions were formed in the country. This was further legalized by the promulgation of the Eritrean Employment Act of 1958. This in turn pushed the imperial Ethiopian government to issue a labour relations decree to guide labour related actions in Ethiopia.²²³

By 1962, a combination of workers' initiative, scholars' intervention, shifting state policies and the issuance of the Eritrean Employment Act in 1958 had forced the government to realize that the time had come to do something about labour relations. The government began preparing a program to legitimize labour unions and to delineate procedures for handling labour disputes. Unable to resist the pressure any longer the government issued the first labour legislation in the history of the country on 5 September 1962. This meant that the previously organized covert labour unions had obtained de facto state recognition as Ethiopian Labour Unions (ELU) which was later transformed into CELU.²²⁴

1.3.2. Exogenous Factors

The change in attitude on the part of the imperial Ethiopian government towards labour and labour institutions was also stimulated by exogenous factors. Among others, International Labour Organization (ILO), International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and African trade unions pressed the Imperial Ethiopian government to promulgate a labour relation decree and recognize workers' right to freedom of association. The international and regional labour unions sent some of their experts to advise and give both moral and material support to the leaders of Ethiopian workers and urged the government to give legal status to workers'

²²³Stutz, p. 38.

²²⁴Killion, p. 447; IES/MS 2992; Arnold Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops in Ethiopia," Boston University Paper on Africa, 1968, p.104.

associations. In the first African regional conference of the ILO which was held in Lagos, Nigeria in 1960, ILO encouraged member countries including Ethiopia to ratify recommendations and conventions concerning the freedom of association and protection of right to organize for collective bargaining.²²⁵

Other than the apparent influence of the ILO on the development of workers' organization in Ethiopia, there were also other international and regional trade unions which influenced the government to give due attention to labour matters. Among others, ICFTU worked hard to strengthen the labour movement in Africa, presumably, in order to contain the influence of the socialist-oriented trade union, i.e World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), in the continent. As it did in other African countries, ICFTU made great effort to influence the Ethiopian government to get legalized labour movement in the country. It used its Eastern, Central and Southern Africa branch office to support the Ethiopian labour movement. The visit of Tom Mboya, a member of the Kenyan Legislative Council, the General Secretary of the Kenyan Federation of Labour (KFL) and the president of the East, Central and Southern Africa branches of ICFTU from 2-10 October 1958 clearly indicated the involvement of the ICFTU in the Ethiopian labour movement. It was reported that Mboya was invited and welcomed by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), but he primarily discussed the position of labour unions in Ethiopia with government officials and the emperor.²²⁶ Thus, the coming of Tom Mboya might have been secretly arranged by the ICFTU by using the invitation from the association as a pretext.

²²⁵Stutz, pp. 33-35.

²²⁶Ethiopian Herald, 4 October 1958.

The purpose of his visit, as he mentioned to Geoffrey Furlonge, the Ambassador of Great Britain to Ethiopia, on 3 October 1958 was to investigate the condition of trade unions in the country; to encourage the Ethiopians to start a branch of ICFTU in the country and to arrange for at least two or three trade unionists training in the ICFTU training center at Kampala, Uganda. He also discussed with the emperor about Ethiopian workers' organizations and their legal recognition. In his discussion, Mboya explained the importance of organized labour for development to the emperor and urged him to legalize labour unions. He also claimed that the emperor had shown himself very sympathetic to his projects and had promised him every assistance. Moreover, in his speech at the National Library Tom Mboya expressed his disappointment at the absence of labour unions in Ethiopia. He also noted that Ethiopia had so far been unrepresented at meetings of African Trade Unionists and he hoped to see Ethiopian labour leaders at the opening of the new trade union college, African Labour College in Kampala on 3 November 1958. He also held discussions with the Ministry of Community Development about the importance of trade unions to the country.²²⁷

In the press conference that he gave before he left Ethiopia, Tom Mboya said that "I have been assured that the government is not against the formation of labour unions. On the contrary, I have been assured that the government will encourage them. I will be very happy to see Ethiopia participating in our future activities." Moreover, he expressed his strong wish that labour unions will develop and grow in Ethiopia and that they will work in the future with labour unions

²²⁷IES/GB, FO/371, 379/ 131303, A Report from British Embassy to the Governor of Nairobi, Governor of Uganda, Governor of British Somali Land, the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain and the political Officer of the British forces in Eden on 12 October 1958; Arnold M. Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops in Ethiopia," in Jeffrey Butler and A.A. Castagno, *Boston University Papers on Africa: Transition in African Politics* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1968), p.112.

throughout Africa.²²⁸ As he was the first international trade unionist who was permitted to come to Ethiopia to discuss labour affairs, Mboya had a personal impact on the Ethiopian labour movement. The connection that Mboya established with Bereket Habte Selassie helped him to convince the emperor. For instance, it was with the help of Bereket that Mboya organized a public speech at the National Library.²²⁹ Thus, I argue that the visit of Tom Mboya motivated the imperial Ethiopian government to legalize the labour movement and try to use the organization for the development of the country.

The imperial Ethiopian government also faced pressure from African trade unions. Since WWII the labour movement in Africa showed development. Thus, they played an important role during the decolonization process. True, many independent African states had already recognized trade unions. Like African states, trade unionists were trying to establish a regional trade union. Thus, it would be inconsistent for Ethiopia, which was beginning to show its power and influence in the political, economic and social affairs in Africa to remain without labour legislation. It would be disgraceful for Ethiopia to deny recognition to its labour unions. More importantly, the government feared that it would create a negative impression on the African heads of states in the forth-coming African summit conference which was to be held in Addis Ababa in May 1963.²³⁰

The development of Ethiopia's role in African politics since the end of the 1950s and mainly at the beginning of 1960s and its keen interest to be seen as better than other African countries resulted in the recognition of workers' right to freedom of association. The formation of the

²²⁸Ethiopian Herald, 11 October 1958.

²²⁹Bereket, pp. 144-145.

²³⁰Gebre Negus, pp.7-8. Arnold Zack, "Trade Unions Develops...", 1968, p. 106.

Organization of African Unity (OAU) with Addis Ababa as its head-quarters in 1963 was also an important factor for the government to change its policies on labour. The fact that there was a viable labour movement in most member countries of OAU and the acknowledged role of labour movement in economic development throughout the world stood in contrast with the modest labour gains in Ethiopia and helped bring into focus the need for change.²³¹ Above all, I argue that the more active role that Emperor Haile Selassie I played in African affairs in general and during establishment of OAU in particular and his aspiration to be perceived as Africa's premier leader by African heads of state resulted in the introduction of an opportunistic policy changes towards labour. Indeed, this move, undoubtedly, changed the labour relations in the country.

Conclusion

The last decade of the 19th century and more importantly the early 20th century marked the birth of an incipient capitalism in Ethiopia. The advent of private foreign capital into the country following the battle of Adwa resulted in the emergence of a nascent capitalist economy in Ethiopia. The influx of private foreign capital further reinforced the mercantile activities in the country. Accordingly, the Franco-Ethiopian Railway was constructed as the first transport enterprise in the country. Even though the beginning of wage labour in Ethiopia can be traced back to the early 19th century, it was the construction of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway line that hastened the proletarianization of the peasantry in Ethiopia.

The pattern of the proletarianization of the peasantry in Ethiopia paralleled with the pattern of foreign capital penetration into the country. Likewise, the pattern of the making of working class

²³¹Belete Belachew, "Ethiopia in African Politics, 1956-1991," PhD Dissertation, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 2012, p. 283.

in Ethiopia paralleled with the pattern of the proletarianization process in the country. The making of the nascent working class in Ethiopia can, therefore, be traced back to the early twentieth century when Emperor Menilek II initiated foreign capital penetration into Ethiopia through trade and concessions and made the first serious attempt in modernizing and industrializing the country. True, the embryo of the Ethiopian working class was first observed in the Franco-Ethiopian Railway that initiated the proletarianization of a substantial number of peasants in the country.

As the number of Ethiopian workers increased in the company, they began to get organized in the form of self-help association and help each other in time of marriage, death and other social events or problems. The self help association helped workers to strengthen their solidarity and develop their class consciousness. Eventually, they transformed their association into a labour union, the Franco-Ethiopian Workers' Union in July 1946. It was also reported that Emperor Haile Selassie I supported them to get unionized and defend their interest. Thus, it can be argued that the Ethiopian labour movement was started by the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Workers' Union and later expanded to other industrial plants across the country.

In general, the early development of the Ethiopian labour movement passed through three different stages. In the first stage, Ethiopian labourers in different industrial enterprises established self-help associations to help member workers who were made redundant for various reasons. In the second stage, workers in the associations and outside began to develop class consciousness and struggle to promote their class interests. They combined economic demands with nationalist consciousness against foreign employers and the state. At this stage, the self-help associations transformed themselves into covert labour unions. The self-help associations

established in Franco-Ethiopian Railway, Ethiopian Fiber Factory and Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Plantation, for instance, were soon transformed into covert labour unions. In the third stage, factory level covert labour unions joined together to form cooperatives and employ laid off and injured workers. This evolved into a strong labour movement and resulted in the establishment of the Ethiopian Labour Unions (ELU), the first of its kind in the history of Ethiopia, as a precursor of the later Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU).

CHAPTER TWO

CONFEDERATION OF ETHIOPIAN LABOUR UNIONS (CELU) AND THE IMPERIAL REGIME, 1962-1974

Exogenous and endogenous factors induced the imperial Ethiopian government to issue a labour relations decree and recognize employers' associations and labour unions for the first time in the history of Ethiopia. Once the formation of labour unions was legally recognized, a number of workers in several industrial plants began to establish local unions. The establishment of a number of local unions in turn resulted in the birth of CELU, the first national labour confederation in the history of Ethiopia. Besides its active involvement in the tripartite relations with the employers' association and the imperial Ethiopian government, CELU called a general strike three months after its establishment. It also worked tirelessly to strengthen its organizational structure and improve the appalling living conditions of members. Furthermore, it managed to establish relationship with international labour unions, inter alia, the African American Labour Center (AALC), the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). On the other hand, the state formed strong alliance with management and worked to control CELU. Thus, the formative period of the Ethiopian labour movement was characterized by the struggle between CELU, which was working with determination to be a vibrant and independent confederation, on the one hand and the state, which feared the growth of strong labour unions as a threat to its political power on the other hand.

This chapter deals with the overall relationship between CELU and the imperial Ethiopian government between 1962 and 1974. Among other things, it tries to delve into such questions: What was the impact of the labour relations decree on the development of labour unions in Ethiopia? How did CELU emerge and begin to threaten the state? How did the 1963 attempted general strike change the relationship between CELU and the state? To what extent was tripartism practiced during the imperial period? How did the imperial Ethiopian government support CELU's endeavor to establish a viable relationship with international trade unions?

2.1. The Enactment of the First Labour Law and the Recognition of Workers' Organizations

The early 1960s marked the change in the imperial Ethiopian state's policy towards labour because of external and internal pressures. International and regional labour organizations, as well as indigenous and traditional self-help associations, played an important role in this regard. More importantly, the ever growing insistence of workers on creating associations and the increasing number of their petitions presented to the emperor, and the clandestine support and advice of the intellectuals and the enlightened civil servants pressurized the imperial Ethiopian state to enact a labour relations decree on 5 September 1962. The various industrial disputes that were frequently submitted to the emperor through popular petitions for resolution made the emperor and his government aware of the political dangers that might ensue if a trade union movement was to be suppressed when it had support of the majority of the workers. As a result, the emperor held a series of discussions on the urgency of preparing a labour law with his Council of Ministers in 1961. The emperor and his government envisaged that the labour law

would not only change the precarious conditions of the country's labour relations by guaranteeing the freedom of association for workers but it would also contribute to the political stability and socio-economic development of the country.¹

Following the report of the council of ministers on the necessity of labour laws not only to improve the labour relations but also to facilitate the socio-economic development of the country, the emperor authorized them to set up an inter-ministerial committee and study the overall situation of labour in Ethiopia. The council of ministers in turn appointed a subcommittee of three, including; Yelema Dārēssa, Endalkačāw Mäkonān and *Däjjazmč* Zāwdē Gābrā Selassē, to study the conditions of labour in the country. The sub-committee set up a technical committee comprised of Seyum Härägot, Mohämmäd Abdulrahman and an expert from the MNCD. This technical committee continued to carry out its task together with labour experts who were working in Ethiopia. Among others, Donald E. Paradis, who was then the advisor in the Prime Minister office, and Count Von Baudissin, a German labour expert who was employed as an advisor in the Ministry of National Community Development (MNCD), provided pertinent analyses of labour relations to the subcommittee.²

The first job of the technical committee and the experts was to conduct basic research and identify the most important provisions to be included in the draft labour relations decree. Besides conducting a thorough investigation of the existing statutory provisions, the committee

¹Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State in the Ethiopian Region, 1919-1974," PhD Dissertation, University of Stanford: Department of History, 1985, p. 447; Arnold M. Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops in Ethiopia," in Jeffery Butler and A.A Castagno (ed.) *Boston University Papers on Africa: Transition in African Politics* (New York; Washington; London: Frederick A, Praeger Publishers, 1968), p.107.

²Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation of Labour Unions (CELU) and Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF) under the Haile Selassie Regime," Un Published Monograph, Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York, 2005, pp. 33-34.

made a comparative study of various labour legislations promulgated both in developing and developed countries. It also carried out a comprehensive analysis of some of the conventions and recommendations adopted by the ILO. The committee also visited various places in the country and held discussions with different sections of the society. This gave it a virtually complete picture of the general situation of labour in the country. The result of all these studies confirmed that the labour situation in the country was very precarious and needed an urgent legal instrument to improve it.³

The labour relations decree passed through several stages of assessment before it was issued as a decree and became an integral part of the country's law. Labour experts under the direct auspices of the technical committee prepared several drafts and submitted them to the government for consideration. The architect of the labour relation decree was Count Graf Von Baudissin, a German labour expert from West Germany who was employed as an advisor in the MNCD in May 1961. He submitted the first draft to the government on 13 July 1961. The draft focused mainly on three major and core issues of labour such as collective bargaining, labour disputes and methods of conciliation, and regulations and the date of entry into force of the Decree. The draft was further enriched by constructive comments given by some pertinent government bodies and submitted for the second time to the Council of Ministers on 25 July 1961. After a thorough discussion of the second draft, labour advisors and experts redrafted the document for the third time and submitted it to the technical committee on 23 November 1961.⁴ Having made a thorough revision of the document, the technical committee presented the third draft to the Imperial Institute of Public Administration for further scrutiny. The institute on its part made

³Georg Graf von Baudissin, "Labour Policy in Ethiopia," *International Labour Review*, Vol. LXXXIX, No. 6, 1964, p. 555.

⁴Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation...", pp. 42-43.

some amendments and submitted the draft to the International Labour Organization (ILO) for evaluation and comments in February 1962. Having incorporated the comments of the international labour organization, the technical committee submitted the final draft to the Council of Ministers in June 1962. The involvement of foreign labour experts, advisors and interested agencies on the drafting of the decree indicated that the imperial Ethiopian government was fully aware of the serious condition of labour relations in the country and worked to introduce a strong legal machinery to improve the situation.⁵

Apart from this, the imperial Ethiopian government also organized a seminar on industrial relations, manpower and employment services on 6 August 1962 to create awareness among officials regarding the proposed labour relations decree. The seminar continued to be given until the beginning of October 1962. The seminar was organized by the MNCD in cooperation with the ILO. It provided officials then employed in various governmental departments and expected to assume responsibilities for labour affairs with a general introductory training in labour relations, manpower and employment services. The seminar was mainly given by two ILO labour experts, Professor Henry Richardson and Robert Jones.⁶ At the end of the seminar, Gètahun Tässäma, the then minister of the MNCD, declared that the government was concluding its preparation to issue a labour relations decree. He stated that:

...Human nature is not always predictable. Labour particularly, tends to be sensitive to authority and discipline. Very often its behavior may even be irritable and yet we have to concede that in the economic progress of a country labour is a vital factor, which can make or mar the industrial progress of a nation... [Thus,]...

⁵Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation...", p. 44; Seleshi Sissay, "Labour in Contemporary Ethiopian Politics: The Case of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions and its First General Strike," A paper presented to the 71st annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in New York City, September, 1976, p. 5.

⁶Ministry of National Community Development, *Seminar on Industrial Relations, Manpower and Employment Services, August to October 1962*, Monograph, 1962, p. 1.

the government which is responsible for guiding the development of the country has to play an effective role in the affairs of labour...[therefore] the proposed legislation is meant to encourage labour to organize itself into labour unions and the employers in association.⁷

While the seminar was going on, based on the recommendation of the emperor, the Labour Relations Decree 49/1962 was issued on 5 September 1962. Nearly a year later, the legislative body made some modifications and proclaimed it as Proclamation No. 210/1963 on 2 October 1963. True, with the issuance of the labour relations decree and the legal recognition of labour unions, the protracted struggle of the Ethiopian workers began to give concrete results. The issuance of the decree was certainly a hallmark in the Ethiopian labour movement. It was the first labour legislation in the history of Ethiopia that granted the workers the right to establish labour unions. It encouraged workers to get organized and defend their interests. It also helped them to understand the ultimate value of unity or being organized. It was also following the promulgation of this decree that workers were able to establish the national confederation, CELU, on 9 April 1963.⁸

Even though the factory proclamation of 1944 addressed some concerns of workers, it did not mention labour relations. Likewise, despite the incorporation of some issues of labour in the 1955 revised constitution and in the Civil Code of 1960, labour relations were not given due emphasis. One cannot, however, deny that the Eritrean Employment Act of 1958 was an important experiment from which the labour relations decree of 1962 borrowed its basic provisions. Be that as it may, it was with the enactment of the labour relations decree of 1962 that the legal

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁸Berhane Gebre Negus, "The Labour Relations Decree of 1962: Possible Impact on Labour and Management," BA Thesis, Haile Selassie I University: Department of Economics, 1964, pp. 8-10; Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 449.

instrument for collective bargaining between the workers and the employers was instituted.⁹ The decree also granted workers the right to form labour unions and bestowed equal bargaining power upon the management and workers. The Department of Labour, which would have the power to solve industrial problems, was also set up within the MNCD. The Labour Board, which was responsible for resolving labour disputes between labour and management, was also established.¹⁰

The main objective of the labour relations decree, as stated in the preamble, was to promote a higher standard of living for the Ethiopian people by establishing a harmonious relationship between labour and management. It stated that:

...The promotion of a higher standard of living for our people is greatly dependent upon the harmonious and voluntary cooperation of labour and enterprises...and such cooperation should have as its objectives the creation of prosperous labour conditions in all enterprises; and... the settlement of labour disputes through collective bargaining between employers and employees or their lawfully established representatives; and... the establishment of principles may be applied.¹¹

The labour relations decree of 1962 aimed at fulfilling three major functions: Primarily, it legalized the formation of labour unions and employers' association for the first time in the history of Ethiopia. Secondly, the decree encouraged both labour unions and employers' association to resolve industrial disputes through collective bargaining. The decree encouraged the conclusion of collective bargaining agreements and even empowered the MNCD to draft and circulate model collective bargaining agreements to management and labour unions and guide

⁹Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of an Ethiopian Labor Leader* (Baltimore: Publish America, LLP, 2010), p. 66; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with Labour Relations in Ethiopia," A Monograph, Haile Selassie I University: Department of Public Administration, 1969, p. 26.

¹⁰Georg Graf von Baudissin, "Labour Policy in Ethiopia," ..., p. 553.

¹¹*Nägarit Gazêta*, Labour Relations Decree 49/1962, September 5, 1962, p. 136.

them in their negotiations. Apart from this, the Department of Labour in the MNCD gave training for conciliators recruited from their own staff and promised to use non-government personnel acceptable to both sides as conciliators and arbitrators. Thirdly, the decree recognized the establishment of a Labour Relations Board with the prerogative to resolve industrial disputes whenever the parties failed to reach an agreement on their own.¹²

The contribution of the decree to the development of the Ethiopian labour movement can be seen from the extent of the rights that it granted to workers and their unions. It granted them freedom of association, the right to protection, and the right to bargain collectively. It also brought some changes in the labour relations of the country. For instance, following the issuance of the decree, there was a marked increase in labour unions' activity. Workers began to organize unions at enterprise level and increase their membership.¹³

As the decree was prepared without the participation of workers, however, it did not include the provisions that workers demanded most. Among other things, the right to strike and the question of minimum wage were not addressed by the decree. Despite workers' struggle for a comprehensive labour law, the decree was not a concession to their demands; rather it was portrayed as a grant by the imperial Ethiopian state. As a result, some of the provisions in the decree were more in the nature of restrictions than concessions. The restriction was even reflected on the right of workers to form unions. The right to form unions was not given to all workers; for instance civil servants were excluded. Since the government was by far the largest employer in Ethiopia, this provision seriously affected the growth of labour movement in the

¹²Arnold M. Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops...", p. 108.

¹³Arnold M. Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops...", p. 109; Kiflu Mekuria, "The History of the Growth of Labour Unions in Ethiopia," BA Thesis, Haile Selassie I University: Department of History, 1973, p. 17.

country. Moreover, according to Article 20 (c) of the decree, domestic servants, agricultural workers working in farms employing less than ten permanent employees and industrial workers in firms employing less than 50 workers were also excluded from any of the provisions regarding either employees or public servants. Article 22(c) of the decree also put further restrictions on unions by ruling out political involvement of labour as illegal and by limiting the opportunity to exercise the right to strike. It stated that: "...Employers' associations and labour unions shall not pursue political aims or engage in any political activities whatsoever."¹⁴

Interestingly enough, the labour relations decree attributed the existence of labour unions only to the good will of the imperial Ethiopian government. The decree empowered the MNCD to implement the labour relations decree. Article 3(g) of the decree, for instance, empowered the Minister "to petition the courts to dissolve employers' associations or labour unions in accordance with Article 461 of the Civil Code of 1960."¹⁵ In addition, the decree gave tremendous power to the Labour Board which was dominated by government officials. The Board was empowered not only to consider, mediate and arbitrate labour disputes but also to prohibit unfair labour practices, to direct workers and organizations to refrain from such acts, to decide upon temporary matters prior to final settlement, to issue decisions and awards, and to enforce them by appropriate means. It had also the power to provide recommendation to the minister to dissolve labour unions. Article 12/a (iv) of the decree, for instance stated that "... the Board has the power to recommend to the minister the dissolution of organizations." ¹⁶ Thus, one can argue that since the decree bestowed significant prerogatives on the MNCD and the Labour Board, labour unions were forced to remain dependent on the goodwill of the government for

¹⁴*Nägarit Gazèta*, Labour Relations Decree 49/1962, September 5, 1962, pp. 146-147.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 143.

their existence and for the legislation of labour laws. Employers and labour unions were only required to bargain in good faith once they were registered in the ministry. In addition, since the provisions of the decree did not address all the demands of workers, it continued to be the center of disagreements between workers and the state until it was substituted by another comprehensive labour law. Workers continued to demand for a comprehensive labour law eight months after the promulgation of the first labour law. Thus, the enactment of the labour relations decree of 1962 and the legal recognition given to the labour unions were primarily inspired by the desire of the imperial Ethiopian government to get a good image among African leaders as it was actively engaged in African issues following the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It was not a genuine response to the workers' demands.

Be that as it may, the decree contributed a lot to the development of labour movement in Ethiopia. For instance, it opened the door for workers to organize a national confederation and engage in collective actions. It was also a turning point in the history of the Ethiopian labour movement. Following the proclamation, local unions were recognized and began to get registered in the MNCD. Within a short period of time after the proclamation a relatively large number of plant unions were also established. In the first six months after the decree, for instance, more than thirty plant unions representing more than ten thousand members were registered with the MNCD.¹⁷ Thus, one can argue that the enactment of the labour relations decree and the automatic recognition of labour unions resulted in the establishment of a number of local unions in several industrial enterprises. The formation of local unions at enterprise level, eventually, resulted in the birth of the national confederation.

¹⁷R. Stutz, "The Developing Industrial Relation System in Ethiopia," A Teaching Material, Addis Ababa University: Department of Economics, 1967, p. 14.

2.2. The Rise of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions

Even though the first organized labour movement and the subsequent formation of labour unions in Ethiopia is believed to have been begun by the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers in Dire Dawa on 22 July 1946¹⁸, it required around two decades to develop into a confederation. The initiative to organize a national confederation was taken by the Ethiopian Fiber Factory workers. More importantly, the Ethiopian fiber factory *edder* leader, Abära Gämu, played an important role in the establishment of the first national workers' self-help association that incorporated workers outside their company. The establishment of this association laid down the foundation for the establishment of the country's first national confederation. Abära's cooperative movement, which started in May 1961, eventually, resulted in the creation of *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Yä Sera ena Yä Heberät Sändika*, Ethiopian Workers' Development and Cooperative Syndicate, as the first national self-help association in Ethiopia on 15 July 1961. The primary aim of this country-wide self-help association was to support all members in need, especially those who had been illegally dismissed from work.¹⁹ After a year, however, with the intervention of educated individuals both from the state bureaucracy and Haile Selassie I University, the cooperative movement was transformed into a covert national labour union, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Yä Heberät Derejit Sändika*, Ethiopian Workers' Mutual Association Syndicate or

¹⁸Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel I*, 1976 EC 1976, pp 30-31.

¹⁹Abära Abäbä, "Yä Mozvold Säratäñoče Anäsas," A Personal Record, 1996 EC, p. 2; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel I*, 1976 EC, p. 42; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 E.C (2012), pp.32-34.

Ethiopian Labour Unions (ELU).²⁰ Thus, it was from this covert national labour union that, eventually, the national confederation evolved.

In addition to the unrelenting endeavor of the Ethiopian workers to form a national confederation and the imperial Ethiopian government's policy change towards workers' organization, the intervention of the ICFTU contributed a lot to the birth of the CELU. ICFTU had already established a number of affiliated labour unions in the neighboring countries. It was from these countries that it began to influence the Ethiopian labour movement. For instance, Tom Mboya, member of the Kenyan Legislative Council, General Secretary of the Kenyan Federation of Labour (KFL) and president of the East, Central and Southern Africa branch offices of the ICFTU played an important role in this regard. He befriended Bereket Habte Selassie and persuaded the emperor to recognize workers' organizations in the country.²¹ The latter also urged the leaders of the covert national labour union to work with the ICFTU. In the meantime, Bereket met Howard T. Robinson, an African-American, in charge of the education department at the ICFTU at Bole Airport while the latter was transiting to Kenya. He introduced Robinson with Abreham Mäkonän and Beyene Solomon and discussed the labour situation in Ethiopia. After the discussion, Robinson promised them to send labour experts to Ethiopia to support labour activities immediately after the government promulgated a labour relations decree. After the promulgation of the labour relations decree, the ICFTU sent D. Ramanujam, a Ceylonese labour expert who was working in the organization to Addis Ababa from Brussels to help the Ethiopian

²⁰Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p. 55.

²¹Bereket Habte Selassie, *The Crown and the Pen: The Memoirs of a Lawyer Turned Rebel* (Asmara: The Red Sea Press, Inc, 2007), pp. 144-145.

workers and organize the national confederation.²² This marked the intervention of international labour unions for the first time in the history of the Ethiopian labour movement.

On the other hand, ICFTU had also already started communication with the imperial Ethiopian government and received permission from the emperor to work with the Ethiopian workers. As a result, it sent D. Ramanujam, who launched a training program for union leaders on various issues of labour in Addis Ababa. The training program was organized in cooperation with the University, particularly, the Department of Public Administration, which was the only department offering courses related to labour relations, and the MNCD. While the ICFTU covered the financial expenses of the program, the university arranged one of its student dormitories, *Saba* Hall for the training. The seminar was conducted by Howard T. Robinson and D. Ramanujam from ICFTU, Dr. Seyum Gebregziabher and Raymond R. Gamby from Haile Selassie I University, and Georg Graf von Baudissin from the MNCD. The training was attended by around 40 workers' representatives who came from 33 different enterprises.²³ But, different sources give different figures for the number of participants. For instance, while Stutz puts their number at 60, Seyum has only 35 workers.²⁴ The seminar, which lasted from March 4 to 16, 1963 (*Yäkatit* 25 to *Mägabit* 7, 1955 EC), was officially opened by Gétahun Täsäma, minister of the MNCD. It was also reported that the seminar was well organized and enthusiastically attended. The main objective of the seminar was to educate the labour leaders about the basic features of labour unions. The seminar dealt with, inter alia, major characteristics of democratic union leadership, problems of union leadership, impediments for collective agreements, union

²²Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 65-66; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation...", p. 51.

²³*Addis Zämän*, *Yäkatit*, 26, 1955 EC (March 5, 1963); *Mägabit* 9, 1955 EC (March 18, 1963).

²⁴Stutz, p.114; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned...", p. 56.

administration, democratic union meetings, and the constitution and the labour laws of the country.²⁵

Besides acquainting union leaders with the various issues of labour, the seminar created a platform for the birth of the national confederation. Even though it is difficult to argue that CELU was the direct result of the seminar, it is possible to assert that the seminar enhanced the awareness of workers concerning how to establish and lead a confederation. Apart from this, it was at the closing of the seminar that CELU was formed and the constitution which had been drafted earlier was unanimously endorsed and adopted in the same place. When CELU was formed, it comprised 29 local unions with a total membership of 15,000 workers. On the same day, a general election was held and the first leaders of CELU were elected. Accordingly, Abreham Mäkonän from Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union was elected as president and Zäläqä Wäldä Mariam from Dire Dawa Cotton Mill Workers' Union was made vice president. Furthermore, Beyene Solomon from Heavy Freight Transport Workers' Union was appointed as secretary general, Alämu Bogalä from Ethiopian Fiber Factory Workers' Union; as assistant secretary, Haylu Aga from Ethiopian Airline Workers' Union; as assistant secretary, Däjänè Mäkonän from Fogstad Woodworks' Workers' Union; as treasurer, Šekurlah Yussuf from Ethiopian Fiber Factory Workers' Union as assistant treasurer, and Abära Abäbä from Mozvold Woodworks Workers' Union was elected as auditor. While the president, vice president and the auditor were elected for two years by the General Assembly, the rest were appointed by the General Council for unspecified terms. On the same day, a Board consisting of 15 members was

²⁵*Addis Zämän*, *Yäkatit* 26, 1955 EC (March, 5 1963); *Ethiopian Herald*, March 17, 1963 (*Mägabit* 8, 1955 EC); Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Šaratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Šaratäñoče Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 58; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation...", p. 52; Stutz, p. 114.

set up.²⁶ Nearly a month later, CELU was registered with the Labour Department of the MNCD and officially started functioning on 9 April 1963. In a letter written to all concerned institutions of the imperial Ethiopian government dated 1 May 1963 (23 *Miyazeya* 1955 EC), the MNCD announced that: "...የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ድርጅት አንድነት ማህበር ከሚያዝያ 1 ቀን 1955 ዓም ጀምሮ በህግ ታውቆ የተፈቀደ መሆኑን እናስታውቃለን።"²⁷ The president of CELU also dispatched it to all member local unions and to a few international labour unions with a covering letter dated to 2 May 1963 (24 *Miyazeya* 1955 EC).²⁸

Figure 2.1. Participants of the First Seminar Organized by ICFTU at *Saba* Hall in HSIU.



Source: Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy*..., p. 134.

At the beginning, CELU was not a well structured organization. The absence of qualified personnel and the prevailing financial constraints were the major factors that hindered CELU

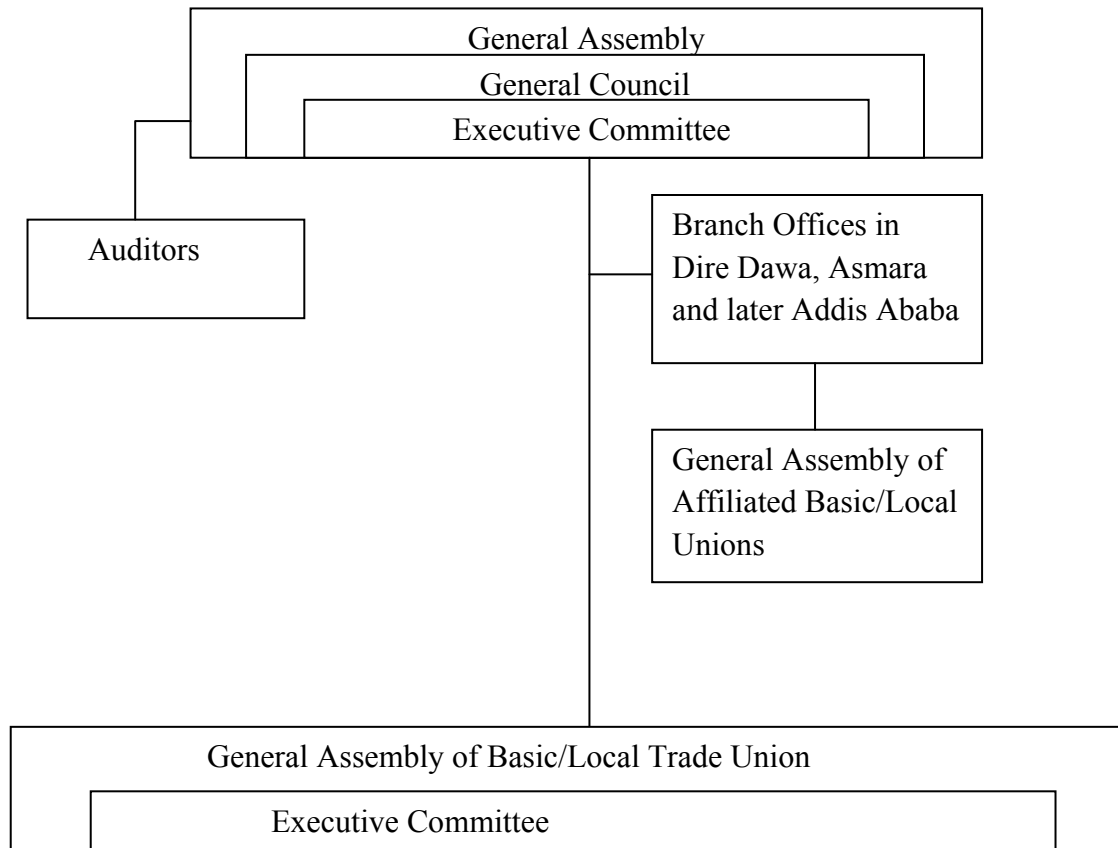
²⁶R.Stutz, p. 114; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, pp. 59-60; Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 68-69.

²⁷"...We would like to notify that the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions is legally recognized and allowed to function as of April 9, 1963." See also Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Union's Archive hereafter (CETU): CETU, Box No. 48, File No. 03, A letter written from Täfära Haylä Selasè to all concerned organizations. The letter announced the establishment of CELU to all concerned organizations.

²⁸CETU, Box No. 9, File No. 1, A letter written from Abreham to Ministry of Pension and Property Distribution *Miyazeya* 24, 1955E.C (May 2, 1963). It deals with the formation of CELU.

from establishing a good organizational structure. A number of positions at the department level were left vacant until the third term election in 1967. More importantly, most of the departments such as Education Department, Legal and Economic Department, Institutional Building Department, Information Department, Administration Department and International Relations Department were virtually vacant. The works of each department was carried out by the other top officers of CELU. However, after the third term election, all the departments were filled by qualified personnel.²⁹

Figure 2.2. The Structure of CELU



Source: The First Constitution of CELU, *Miyazeya* 1, 1955EC (April 9, 1963), pp. 2-4.

²⁹Informants: Gäbrä Selasë Gäbrä Mariam, Gëtačäw Mängäša and Abära Abäbä

Since its establishment, CELU tried to be a democratic organization. It aimed at improving the socio-economic and moral conditions of workers all over the country. It also aspired to help affiliated local unions throughout the country. All duly registered local unions had the right to become member of the confederation. According to Article 2/b of the first constitution of CELU, any local union which aspired to join CELU had to submit a written application together with its rules and regulations to the Secretary General of the confederation. Article 2/c of the constitution also stated that the executive committee had the power to accept or reject membership applications. Nevertheless, if the executive committee rejected the application, the applicant had the right to appeal to the General Assembly of CELU which met every two years.³⁰ In order to avoid such circumstances, however, the confederation often distributed samples of regulations to all the newly organized local unions. As a result, membership was almost automatic. Apart from this, at the beginning, rejection of the application of local unions for membership was rare because CELU was engaged not only in organizing local unions but also in increasing its membership. Thus, it is possible to argue that CELU served as an agent in organizing local unions and registering them as members of the confederation.

Regardless of the number of members, each local union, whether it had 50 members or 8000 members, had a fair, if not equal, say in the confederation's administration and the formulation of its policy. Each local union was represented in the General Assembly and in the General Council of CELU's organizational structure proportional to the size of its membership. The General Assembly was the highest organ of the confederation. It met every two years in April to hear progress reports, determine general policies and to pass resolutions. Every member union was

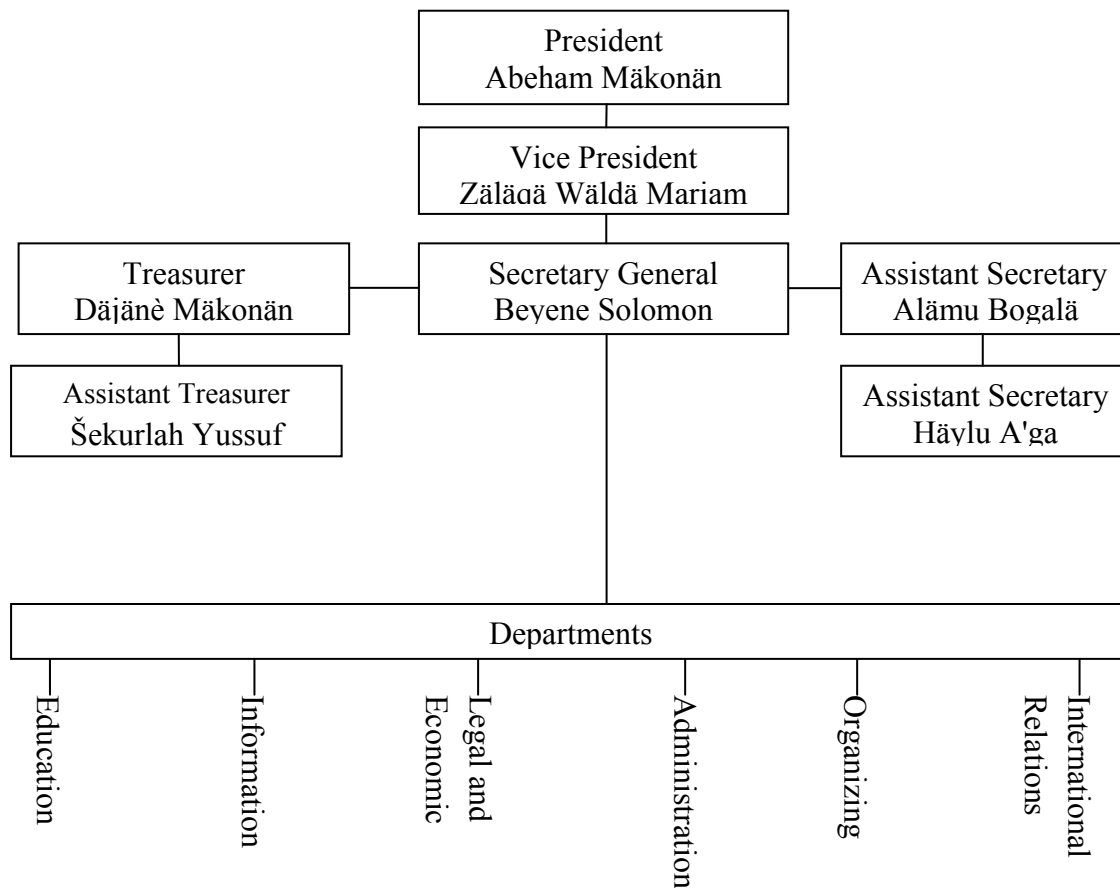
³⁰*Ibid.*

represented by at least one member. But, a union with more than 1000 membership was represented by two members and one additional member for every 1000 until it reached seven.

The General Council, however, met every three months and was a policy making body. It controlled and coordinated CELU's administration and voiced the opinions of labour in between General Assembly's meetings. The General Council included the executive officers of CELU and representatives of member unions. Member unions with a total membership of above 1000 were represented by two delegates whereas unions with a total membership of below 1000 were represented by only one delegate. Moreover, it was only those delegates whose unions had paid their annual dues who were allowed to attend the General Councils' meeting. Between the meetings of the General Council, very urgent issues including those which needed major policy modifications were decided by the Executive Committee. It constituted members elected from the general council and the officers. It was chaired by the president and met every month; it reported its work to the General Council. The Executive Committee also organized a subcommittee which was only called upon occasionally. Most of the members of the Executive Committee were officers, including; the president, vice president, secretary general, assistant secretaries, treasurer, assistant treasurer and auditor, who carried out the day today routine works of CELU.³¹

³¹CETU, Box 9, File No. 04, It is a compilation of the various regulations developed by CELU in 1955 EC (1963); The First Constitution of CELU, *Miyazeya* 1, 1955EC (9 April, 1963), pp. 4-5.

Figure 2.3. The First Executive Committee of CELU



Source: The First Constitution of CELU, *Miyazeya* 1, 1955EC (9April 1963), pp. 2-4

The organizational strength of an institution is partially determined by its financial strength. Even though CELU managed to set up its organizational structure, it could not work to the satisfaction of member unions because of financial problems. True, according to Article 4 of the constitution, new members had to pay E\$ 1 for registration fee during admission, E\$3 annually thereafter.³² The membership fees and registration fees were not, however, enough for CELU to carry out its activities. As it was common in other labour unions in developing countries, CELU

³²*Ibid.*, p. 1.

had too many book memberships and too little members who actually paid their dues. At the beginning, the financial position of CELU was highly precarious.³³

Nevertheless, the leaders of CELU tried to solve this problem by encouraging the check-off system in which employers deduct dues from members and passed it on to the treasurer of the local union or directly sent the money to CELU. The application of this system in a few industrial plants helped CELU to get dues regularly. But, since the local unions themselves were not yet well organized, CELU remained reluctant to force them pay their dues. On the other hand, employers also often refused to deduct workers' dues. As a result, many member unions had arrears and faced difficulties to participate in the General Assembly and General Council meetings.³⁴

After some time, however, CELU managed to get substantial amount of financial assistance from ICFTU and AALC. These international trade unions contributed a lot to the growth of CELU. They helped CELU not only financially but also in expertise. For instance, since the establishment of CELU, a few ICFTU and AALC experts came voluntarily to help CELU. Apart from this, the strong relationship created between CELU and international trade unions further encouraged a number of workers in various industrial plants to join CELU. This further strengthened the amount of dues collected from members.³⁵

³³Tamrat Bekele, "The Emergence of Labour Unions and Government Policy in Ethiopia," MA Thesis, California State University, Hayward: Department of Business Administration, pp. 31-32; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with ...," pp. 58-59.

³⁴*Voice of Labour*, A Special Issue for the Seventh Year Anniversary of CELU and the Inauguration of its New Headquarters, April 9, 1970, p.17.

³⁵Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with ...," p. 62.

2.3. The Institutionalization of Tripartism

Since its establishment in 1919, ILO has been considered as the only international organization in which voting power in setting standards and policies was distributed among governments, employers and workers. It promoted cooperation among the three partners to bring about social justice. These three partners have been taking part in all discussions and decision making concerning labour matters. This tripartite structure in the work and governance of ILO has been viewed as a unique feature of the organization. It is one of the basic features of the ILO that provided equal status to the representatives of the three parties in its General Conference.³⁶

Tripartism can, thus, be defined as "...the process by which workers, employers and governments contribute to the setting of workplace standards and the protection of workers' rights worldwide."³⁷ The concept of tripartism is defined based on Article 3(i) of the ILO constitution. It stated that:

...The meetings of the General Conference of representatives of the members shall be held from time to time as occasion may require, and at least once in every year. It shall be composed of four representatives of each of the members, of whom two shall be government delegates and the two others shall be delegates representing respectively the employers and the workpeople of each of the members.³⁸

³⁶Gerry Rodgers, Eddy Lee, Lee Swepston and Jasmien Van Daele, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2009), p. 12.

³⁷William R. Simpson, "The ILO and Tripartism: Some Reflections," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 117, No. 9, Special Issue Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the International Labor Organization September, 1994, pp. 40-41, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41844334>.

³⁸"The original text of the Constitution, established in 1919, has been modified by the amendment of 1922 which entered into force on 4 June 1934; the Instrument of Amendment of 1945 which entered into force on 26 September 1946; the Instrument of Amendment of 1946 which entered into force on 20 April 1948; the Instrument of Amendment of 1953 which entered into force on 20 May 1954; the Instrument of Amendment of 1962 which entered into force on 22 May 1963; and the Instrument of Amendment of 1972 which entered into force on 1 November 1974."

True, despite its limited membership, the Governing Body of ILO is also tripartite. Apart from its constitution, the ILO also promoted tripartism by issuing three important instruments such as Recommendation No.113/1960 (A Recommendation on Tripartite Consultation at Industrial and National Level)³⁹, Recommendation No.152/1976 (A Recommendation on Tripartite Consultation on ILO's Activities),⁴⁰ and Convention No.144/1976 (A Convention on Tripartite Consultation to Promote the Implementation of International Standards.)⁴¹

The tripartite structure was not only institutionalized in the headquarters of ILO in Geneva but also expanded to member countries. The founding members of ILO, for instance, began to institutionalize tripartism as the same time with the organization. Nevertheless, some members institutionalized it much later than the ILO and even long after being a member of ILO.⁴² Ethiopia can be taken as an example in this regard. Even though it joined ILO on 28 September 1923, it had never been represented with delegates who could meet the tripartite structure of the organization until 1963. This was mainly because Ethiopia had no employers' association and labour unions yet.⁴³ In June 1963, however, Ethiopia sent its tripartite delegation to the 47th ILO General Conference for the first time. The delegation comprised of Gètahun Tässäma (Minister of MNCD) and Colonel Dawit Gäbru (State Minister of MNCD) from the government, and

³⁹http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312289

⁴⁰International Labour Organization, *Trade Unions and the ILO: A Workers' Education Manual, Second edition* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1988), p. 21.

⁴¹<http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12030::NO::>

⁴²Gerry Rodgers, Eddy Lee, Lee Swebston and Jasmien Van Daele, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2009), p.15.

⁴³Lynn G. Morehous, "Ethiopian Labor Relations: Attitudes, Practice and Law," *Journal of Ethiopian Law*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1969, p. 6; Georg Graf Von Baudissin, "An Introduction to Labour Developments in Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Law*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1965, p. 108.

Abreham Mäkonän and Dr. Seyum Gābārā Egziabhèr from CELU and Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF), respectively.⁴⁴

Apart from sending a tripartite delegation to the ILO General Conference, the MNCD established a tripartite institution to enhance the socio-economic development of the country. True, this was supported by the imperial government which realized that economic and social development was an all-embracing process requiring national efforts, involving all the people in the country, including labour and management. Socio-economic development cannot be achieved only through the dynamic and impartial leadership of the government but also through the active participation of interested groups. Recognizing the role of interest groups in the socio-economic development of the country, the imperial Ethiopian government issued a labour relations decree which guaranteed the workers and the employers to form labour unions and employers' association respectively. It also legalized the establishment of a tripartite institution, the Labour Relations Board. Institutionalizing the tripartite structure in the country helped CELU and EEF to play a vital role in the socio-economic endeavor of Ethiopia. In general, tripartism helped these interest groups to realize that they had a responsibility to give their support to all genuine measures taken by the government for the economic and social development of the country.⁴⁵

The Labour Board comprised of five members appointed for a three years term by the emperor upon the recommendation of the MNCD, was instituted and began its function on 20 February 1963 (*Yäkatit 13*, 1955EC).⁴⁶ True, its establishment was already guaranteed by the labour relations decree of 1962 and supported by the government. In principle, while the three members

⁴⁴*Voice of Labour*, Vol. I, No. 1, *Hamle* 1, 1955EC (July 8, 1963), p. 2.

⁴⁵*Voice of Labour*, A Special Issue for the Seventh Year Anniversary of CELU and the Inauguration of its New Headquarters, April 9, 1970, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁶*Addis Zämän*, *Nähäse* 25, 1955EC (31 August 1963).

of the Labour Board were appointed by the government, employers' association and labour unions were represented by one member each. Be that as it may, all the original members of the Labour Board were, however, appointed by the government. Perhaps, this was apparently a result of the vagueness of Article 5(a) of the labour relations decree concerning the composition of the Board. It stated that: "...the Board shall consist of five (5) members appointed by Us upon the recommendation of the Minister, one of whom shall be designated as Chairman. An adequate number of deputy members shall also be appointed." It further stated in Sub article (b) that "...employers' associations and labour unions may be invited to nominate candidates for appointment as members and deputy members of the Board."⁴⁷ Thus, because the phrase 'may be invited' was so vague, employers' associations and labour unions were not represented in the Labour Relations Board in its first term election. The original members of the Board were Blatta Terfè Šumeyä (Chairman), *Blatta* Qeṭaw Yetaṭäqu, Yelma Haylu, *Blatta* Keflä Egzi Yehädego and Seyum Harägot. They were all government officials and lawyers by profession. Contrary to the vagueness of Article 5, CELU argued that "...በመጀመሪያው ጊዜ ሹመት ግን ሁለቱም ወገኖች ወኪሎቻቸውን እንዲያቀርቡ አልተደረገም። በህዝባዊ ኑሮ ዕድገት ብቻ ተመርጠው የቀረቡ አባሎች ነበሩ። ይህም የሆነበት ዋናው ምክንያት ድርጅቱ ገና አዲስ በመሆኑ እና የሰራተኞችም ሆነ የአሰሪዎች አቋም ገና ጨቅላ ስለነበር መንግስት ሀላፊነቱን ወስዶ ቢሾም የተሻለ ነው በሚል ነበር። በአሁኑ ሹመት ግን ሁለቱም ተቋሞች ወኪሎቻቸውን ልከው በበርዱ አባልነት ተካፋዮች እንዲሆኑ አድርገዋል።"⁴⁸

Apart from the composition, the Board members were also criticized for lack of practical experience about labour relations disputes. Consequently, the government was forced to keep the tripartite nature of the Board by taking representatives of employers and workers as members.

⁴⁷*Nägarit Gazēta*, Labour Relations Decree 49/1962, September 5, 1962, p. 141.

⁴⁸"...The main reason for this was that since the labor relations board, labour unions and employers' associations were still infant organizations, it was found better if the government took the responsibility and appoints all members of the Board. In the second term, however, both organizations sent their representatives as members of the Board." See also *Voice of Labour*, A Special Brochure Prepared on the Occasion of the 5th CELU Annual Conference and Anniversary, *Mägabä* 28, 1960 (6April 1968), p.10.

Thus, the composition of the Board was changed in the second term election; it began to include not only the representatives of the government but also representatives of employers and workers. While Yelma Haylu, *Blatta Keflä EgziYehädëgo* (Chairman) and Tefera Haile Selassie were appointed by the government as members of the Board, Dr. Seyum Gebre Egziabher and Aläm Abdi were also elected as members of the Board from EEF and CELU respectively.⁴⁹

The Labour Board was a semi-independent statutory body which had authority over the labour relations of the country. According to Article 12 (a) of the labour relations decree of 1962 the Board had the power "...to consider, conciliate and arbitrate labour disputes, including the power to decide upon temporary measures, if appropriate, prior to final settlement, to issue decisions and awards."⁵⁰ It had also the power to consider any complaint of unfair labour practice and to enforce its decisions and awards by appropriate means. Labour disputes which the labour relations section failed to settle were referred to the Labour Relations Board. Decisions and awards issued by the Board were legally binding. Appeals to the Supreme Court were allowed only on the question of law and not on the question of facts.⁵¹

Whenever an employee had a complaint against his employer, he had three options: to appeal to his employer, to sue his employer in court or to take his complaint to the Labour Relations Board in the MNCD. The last choice was the most frequently used method to resolve labour disputes. An employee who brought a complaint to the MNCD filed it in the labour relation section of the Labour Department, a division of the Ministry. All disputes brought by local unions were first seen in this section. Its power was strictly conciliatory. Its functions would come to an end when

⁴⁹Stutz, p. 93; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with ...," p. 67.

⁵⁰*Nägarit Gazëta*, Labour Relations Decree 49/1962, September 5, 1962, p. 143.

⁵¹*Ibid.*,

it failed to bring the parties to an agreement. Then, the matter was brought to the Labour Relations Board for arbitration.⁵²

In carrying out its responsibilities, the Board had the right to require the parties to appear at its hearings and to present their testimony and evidence, and to enter the premises of any enterprise to obtain information relative to any matter which it had under consideration. It was also possible for the Board to delegate these rights to staff members. At first, disagreement arose among members of the Board over the amount of time and effort that should be expended in conciliation, aimed at voluntary settlement of a dispute, before it reverted to arbitration. Finally, it was decided to relegate the conciliatory activity to the labour relation section and concentrate more on the arbitration process.⁵³ Nevertheless, the decree gave due emphasis to conciliation, a process that required the two parties to solve their complaints through voluntary means.⁵⁴

The labour relations decree urged the Board to settle all labour disputes submitted to it through conciliation. Therefore, when any dispute was submitted, an attempt was made either by the Board itself or staff members to help the parties settle the dispute themselves through the conciliation process. This process involved the convening of a meeting and the offering of advice and suggestions for the settlement of the dispute which the parties were free to accept or reject. True, the Board was also empowered by the law to arbitrate any labour dispute submitted to it. When the conciliation effort failed, the Board began to conduct an arbitration hearing, which was similar to a court procedure in that testimony was taken under oath, witnesses were subject to examination and cross examination, arguments were made and a decision or an award was given

⁵²Morehouse, p. 52.

⁵³Stutz, pp. 93-95.

⁵⁴Arnold M. Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops...", p. 87; Georg Graf von Baudissin, "Labour Policy...", p. 559.

which was binding on the parties to the dispute. The only course of appeal against a decision of the Board was to the Supreme Imperial Court on questions raised concerning the interpretation of the law, and if the court found that the Board erred on a question of law or that the Board's procedure violated the law, the case was returned to the Board for final action.⁵⁵

The Board worked two days a week, only in the afternoon. Regardless of the short time allocated for arbitration, it solved several cases raised by the workers. It often focused on appeals presented in groups, rather than individually. It referred individual cases to the regular court.⁵⁶

Article 33 of the labour relation decree allowed workers to take their cases to the regular courts.

It stated that: "...የስምምነቱ አፈጻጸም በጊዜው ጸንቶ ያለውን ማንኛውንም የህብረት ስምምነት ወይም የቦርዱ ውሳኔ ወይም ብይን የማይቃወም ከሆነ ማንኛውም ሰራተኛ የውሉን ድርድር ተገቢ በሆኑ ፍርድ ቤቶች ወይም መስሪያ ቤት ለማስፈጸም በዚህ ድንጋጌ የተጻፈው አይከለክለውም።"⁵⁷ But, the Board often referred individual cases to the court using this provision as a pretext apparently to reduce its burden. Regardless of the procrastination of many cases submitted to it, however, the Board settled 31 cases by conciliation and closed 20 cases by arbitration or decision in the period between 20 February 1963 (when the Board started work) and 31 July 1963 (when the Board received a general strike ultimatum from CELU)⁵⁸.

Apart from the Labour Board, there were several other tripartite institutions. For instance, the Labour Standard Advisory Board was a tripartite body that provided the MNCD advice and recommendations on general or specific issues relating to labour conditions, and assisted the

⁵⁵Stutz, pp. 58-59.

⁵⁶*Voice of Labour*, A Special Brochure Prepared on the Occasion of the 5th CELU Annual Conference and Anniversary, *Māgabī* 28, 1960 (April 6, 1968), p.11.

⁵⁷"Nothing herein contained shall be deemed to prevent an employee from enforcing the terms of his contract before the appropriate courts or bodies so long as such enforcement is not inconsistent with the terms of any collective agreement or decision or award of the Board then in effect." See also *Nāgarit Gazēṭa*, No. 18, Labour Relations Decree 49/1962, September 5, 1962, p. 150.

⁵⁸Stutz, p. 95.

minister in formulating labour standards or working conditions so as to ensure the physical integrity, the health and well-being of workers.⁵⁹ The Employment Advisory Board was also a tripartite body established to advise the Public Employment Administration on various employment problems in the country.⁶⁰ Moreover, the Manpower Information Advisory committee was a tripartite body that assisted the manpower, research and statistics section in the Public Employment Division. This section was responsible for the gathering of labour statistics and manpower information.⁶¹ These tripartite institutions ultimately created a constructive set of labour relationships that depended on the degree of mutual confidence and respect between management, labour and the government.⁶²

In general, tripartism was an important institution which created a platform for the government, employers and workers to work together for the common good and for the socio-economic development of the country. True, the three parties shared a common interest on several issues like the raising of the national income, the improvement of the standard of living, the raising of productivity etc. Nevertheless, they had also divergent interests concerning the *modus operandi* to achieve socio-economic development in the country. The orderly harmonization of divergent interests, that is the desire for economic development on the one hand and the maintenance of the rights and interests of workers and employers on the other hand constituted the core of industrial relations. On the other hand, the government on its part realized that a prosperous and contented labour force was a prime necessity for the peaceful industrial and agricultural development of the country. With this objective in mind, the government tried to provide a fair deal for both labour

⁵⁹Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with ...," pp. 90-91.

⁶⁰Georg Graf Von Baudissin, "An Introduction to Labour Developments in Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Law*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1965, p. 108.

⁶¹Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with ...," pp. 88-89.

⁶²Stutz, p. 87.

and management to create a good condition in which both employers and unions could work in harmony. It was such tripartite cooperation based on such principles that not only resulted in enormous benefits for the employers' federation and labour unions but also provided tremendous impetus for the socio-economic development of the country.⁶³

2.4. The Attempted General Strike of 1963

Even though the labour relations decree was issued to enhance the mutual benefit of both the workers and employers, it was not enthusiastically accepted even if not utterly rejected by the management. The employers believed that the decree was introduced to benefit only the workers and they continued to violate it on different occasions. They also thwarted the formation of labour unions in their respective enterprises. More importantly, foreign investors who owned several enterprises continued to treat their workers with heavy hand. For instance, they fired workers at whim, thereby breaking rules and procedures. This made the conditions of workers in some enterprises more precarious than ever before. Consequently, a number of cases were brought to the newly established Labour Board though the employers were not yet ready to accommodate the demands of workers. The leaders of local unions were the target of employers' intimidation. The employers' assault on the leaders of local unions increased after the president of CELU left for Geneva on 4 June 1963 to participate on the 47th session of the annual General Conference of ILO. It was the first conference in which Ethiopia participated with full delegation for the first time since it became a member of ILO on 28 September 1923. The delegation included Abreham Mäkonän, president of CELU, Dr. Seyoum Gebre Egziabher, and General

⁶³*Voice of Labour*, A Special Issue for the 7th Anniversary of CELU and the Inauguration of its First Headquarters, *Miyazeya* 1, 1962 EC (9 April 1970), pp. 40-41.

Secretary of the Ethiopian Employers Federation which was in the process of formation and Gètahun Tässäma, Minister of the MNCD. Nevertheless, since African countries including Ethiopia boycotted the meeting because of the participation of Apartheid South Africa, Abreham could not get the chance to speak about the conditions of Ethiopian workers to the participants of the conference who came from 107 countries. However, he held separate discussions with a number of trade union leaders and was able to get immediate invitation to visit their organization and support from some of them.⁶⁴

While he was in Europe, Abreham heard about the influx of a number of newly established local unions into CELU and he was pleasantly surprised by the achievement of the confederation within two months of its establishment. Nevertheless, when he returned on 14 July 1963 and tried to share his experience with the newly formed local unions, he encountered a lot of shocking labour problems and observed despair among a number of member unions. In addition, he found that some workers had been dismissed from work and their case was being considered by the Labour Board in the MNCD. Nevertheless, the Labour Board, which had been organized to solve labour disputes created between labour unions and management, failed to give appropriate solutions to local unions' petitions submitted to it. In fact, employers were not yet ready to respect the provisions of the labour relations decree. Surprisingly, the government kept silent while a number of workers were fired by the management from several industrial plants. The MNCD did not force the employers to attend court and accept judgments.⁶⁵

⁶⁴*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No.2, *Hämlè* 20, 1955 EC (27 July 1963), pp. 5-6; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, *Hämlè* 1, 1955EC (8 July 1963), p. 2.

⁶⁵Informants: Abreham Mäkonän and Beyene Solomon; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 3, *Nähäsè* 4, 1955EC (August 10, 1963), pp.1-2; IES/MS 38/18, Abreham Mäkonän, "Yä Ityopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Tekekeläña Se'el," A Paper Presented in the Conference of Ethiopian Studies on 29 January 1976, p.7.

Having understood the dire situation of local union members, Abreham began to take appropriate steps in accordance with the constitution before a general strike was declared against employers and the government. Even though his measures were ridiculed as premature and counterproductive, Abreham continued to uphold workers' grievances, risking his life. Accordingly, he held a meeting with the leaders of all member unions from 27-28 July 1963 (20-21 *Hämlè* 1955 EC) and discussed as to how to solve the prevailing workers' problems. At the closing of the meeting, the participants agreed to present their complaints to the Labour Board and the management. Moreover, they set up a committee of 14 members to study the problem and draft a list of complaints.⁶⁶

In the draft complaints, the committee stated that since May 1963, unions were suppressed at the Nikola, Fogstad, and Vaskin Woodworks, Aqaqi Steel Factory, Addis Ababa Bricks Factory, Indo-Ethiopian Textile Factory, Ethiopian Fiber Factory, Dire Dawa Textile Factory and Dire Dawa Cement Factory. It further noted that the leaders of several local unions, including; Aqaqi Steel Factory Workers' Union, Fogstad Woodworks Workers' Union, Dire Dawa Textile Factory Workers' Union, and Diabaco Cotton Mill Workers' Union were dismissed in July 1963. In addition, the committee reported that workers from Lazaridis Cotton Mill were arrested when they attempted to petition the emperor concerning the fired union leaders. Thus, on the basis of these complaints, a petition of ten points was prepared by the General Council of CELU to the MNCD demanding the reinstatement of dismissed union members, the release of the arrested workers, clarification of the legal rights and benefits of union members, and state support for these rights in the face of employers' resistance. In conclusion, the petition threatened that if the

⁶⁶IES/MS 38/18, pp.7-8; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 3, *Nähäsè* 4, 1955EC (10 August 1963), p. 2.

MNCD did not act upon these demands within 60 days, CELU would call a general strike. Abreham signed the petition or ultimatum and circulated to the employers and the various offices of the government with a covering letter dated 31 July 1963 (*Hämlè* 24, 1955 EC).⁶⁷

The government received the ultimatum with great anger but remained silent for about two weeks while discussing on its content and the possible measures to be taken against the leaders of CELU. A month before the scheduled general strike, however, Gètahun Tässäma telephoned to Abreham and asked him to come to his office and discuss on some of the problems of workers which needed to be addressed. During the discussion, Gètahun stressed that CELU was still an infant organization which was established five months ago, in the face of serious opposition raised from some government officials. He further added that if CELU could not refrain from its action, it would strengthen the reservations of those officials about its establishment. He also urged the president of CELU to retract the decision and work hand in hand with the ministry to solve the problems. He further added that the problems should only be solved through consultation with the management and the ministry rather than through confrontation. He also asked Abreham to order member unions to call off the general strike by writing a formal letter to them indicating that he had already reached an agreement with the MNCD on the appropriate solution of the problems. Abreham agreed to call off the general strike and left the ministry. The next day, however, Abreham changed his mind and broke the promise that he had made to the minister. Moreover, he wrote him a letter indicating that it was beyond his power to call off the general strike as the decision was made by the General Council.⁶⁸

⁶⁷Abreham Mäkonän's Private Collection, A four page ultimatum written from Abreham to the Labour Department in the MNCD in *Hämlè* 24, 1955 EC (July 31, 1963), pp. 1-4; IES/MS 38/18, pp. 8-9.

⁶⁸Bejene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 72-73.

Abreham told me that he refused to call off the intended general strike because he believed that if he did so, he would automatically lose the trust of the workers.⁶⁹

Following its failure to convince the president of CELU to call off the intended general strike, the Department of Labour in the MNCD opened a campaign against the leaders of CELU through television, radio and news papers. It insisted that CELU must withdraw its demands, for there could be no dispute between unions and government, but only between unions and management. It also demonized the leaders of CELU as traitors who worked to sabotage the socio-economic development of the country. Moreover, it belittled the call for general strike as a premature decision. The intended action of CELU was considered as a deliberate act to hold back the development of industry in the country. In the press statement it released, the Department of Labour stated that:

...The department of labour has tried repeatedly to convince the CELU leaders of the illegality of their intentions, but unfortunately has failed to persuade them to, withdraw from their rash ill-considered line of action which would imperil the interests of thousands of law abiding citizens. These leaders were advised that insistence upon their intimidation must be regarded by the government as a deliberate plot designed to destroy labour peace and to create trouble at an important period of economic and social progress of the country. It was also pointed out that the department of labour could not sit back inactively whilst illegal action as announced by CELU leaders endangered peace, tranquility and industrial development. It is now the responsibility of the labour relations board to consider the case as a matter of urgency, to order such measures as are necessary to implement the law, recommended appropriate steps to safeguard the real welfare of the community, and to protect it from illegal intimidation.⁷⁰

In addition to the pressure and intimidation made by the Department of Labour, the government controlled media continued to call for security measures to be taken against the leaders of CELU.

⁶⁹Informant: Abreham Mäkonän.

⁷⁰Ethiopian Herald, 3 September 1963 (*Nähäse* 28, 1955EC).

For instance, the Ethiopian Herald, in its September 5, 1963, edition, discredited the legal basis of the intended general strike as follows:

...There is a point beyond which patience ceases to be a virtue. And that is the point the Department of Labour in the Ministry of National Community Development has now reached at the unlawful CELU ultimatum to paralyze the capital with an all out labour strike unless demands are fulfilled on the terms dictated by labour. The Ethiopian labour legislation does not empower CELU to trigger- off a general strike. But some CELU leaders want to take the law in their hands and pretend as a legislative body, 'a parliament' of a kind. Such an illegal move must be made to bear legal measures.⁷¹

In addition to its attack through the media, the Labour Department raised financial matters to discredit the leaders of the confederation. They were, for instance, asked to submit the financial accounts of the organization for auditing by the ministry. The Labour Department also tried to associate CELU's intended general strike with international trade union experts who were working in the confederation as volunteers. The mounting pressure and intimidation from both the officials of the Labour Department and the security apparatus created serious concern for the leaders of CELU. Thus, the leaders of CELU decided to petition the emperor on 3 September 1963 concerning its unfair treatment by the ministry and the security apparatus. On reaching the palace, however, the petitioners were denied access to the emperor by the palace guards. When they were denied an audience at the palace, Abära and his colleagues adamantly refused to leave. After spending a lot of time near the gates of the palace, however, they were told that some of

⁷¹Ethiopian Herald, 5 September 1963 (*Nähäse* 30, 1955EC)

their colleagues who entered through another gate had already been inside and had already had a discussion with the emperor and left the palace. But, that was a trick by the palace guards.⁷²

On the same day, some Board members of CELU had gone to see *Ras* Emru, a nephew of the emperor and who had a reputation as a 'liberal' to mediate between CELU and the emperor. Although *Ras* Emru expressed his sympathy, he told the leaders of CELU that he could not mediate between them and the emperor. He further advised them that they should withdraw their demand and exhort Abreham Mäkonän to resign, if they wished to save CELU from complete destruction. Moreover, *Ras* Emru promised them that he could search for a job for Abreham in the MNCD in return for his resignation. The response of *Ras* Emru shattered their hope of getting justice from the emperor. Having understood the situation had become unpredictable and very dangerous, Abreham wrote a letter of resignation and submitted it to the office of the confederation on 3 September 1963 (*Nähäse* 28, 1955EC). In his letter written to the General Council of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions, Abreham stated that:

...የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች ድርጅቶች እንቅስቃሴ ከተጀመረበት ጊዜ ጀምሮ እስከ ዛሬ ድረስ ያላንዳች መሰናከል በጠቅላላው ጉባኤ ምርጫ መሰረት ለኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች ድርጅት ፕሬዝዳንት ሆኖ በሚገባ ሳገለግል መቆየቴን ሁላችሁም እንደምታውቁት ነው። አሁንም ቢሆን ጠቅላላው ጉባኤ ስለ እኔ አገልግሎት ያለውን አስተያየት ሳስበው ምንጊዜም ከምስጋና ጋር አስታውሰዋለሁ። ለጊዜው ግን ሐምሌ 24 ቀን 1955 ዓ.ም ሁላችሁም ተሰብስባችሁ ባደረጋችሁት ውሳኔ መሰረት በታዛዥነቴ ጉዳዩን ለሚመለከተው የመንግስት ባለስልጣን አቅርቤአለሁ። ይህም ሀሳብ በተለይ ለራሴ እንደሰራሁት በማሰኘት ግምት ስለተወሰደና በኔም ምክንያት ብዙ ችግሮች በማህበሩ ላይ ከሚፈጠሩ የመላውን የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች ድርጅት አንድነት ማህበርን ደህንነት በመመኘት ከዛሬ ነሐሴ 28 ቀን 1955 ዓ.ም ጀምሮ የነበረኝን ኅላፊነት የለቀኩ መሆኔን በትህትና እገልጻለሁ።⁷³

...As you all know, being elected as president of CELU on the basis of the election carried out by the General Assembly, I have been serving from the beginning of the movement of the Ethiopian labour unions to this day with diligence. I still remember the General Assembly's commendation of my service with great gratitude. For the time being, abiding by the collective decision that

⁷²Kiflu Mekuria, p. 19; IES/MS 38/18, p. 12; Informants: Abreham Mäkonän, Abära Abäbä and Tadässä Amarä.

⁷³Abreham Mäkonän's Private Collection, A letter of resignation sent from Abreham to the General Council of CELU on 28 *Nähäse* 1955 EC (August 3, 1963).

you made on 31 July 1963, I submitted the matter [the problems of the Ethiopian workers] to the concerned government officials. But, since they have come to suspect that I raised the issue for my own sake and in order not to endanger the confederation,, I wish CELU all the best and hereby resign from my post as of 3 September 1963.

Figure 2.4. Abreham Mäkonän, the First President of CELU



Source: Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Plantation Workers' Unions, *Wonji ena Tegelu*, A Bulletin published by the workers' unions on *Ter* 5, 1970 EC, p.16

In another development, on the evening of 3 September 1963, Abära Gämu reportedly committed suicide. Even though his death was officially declared as suicide, Thomas killion who interviewed Abära's daughter noted that she believed that her father was murdered by state security agents. He further argued that "...in any case, whether he died by his own hand or that

of the secret police, the cause of his death was state repression."⁷⁴ According to him, the death of Abära marked the climax of the conflict between the confederation and the state. Nevertheless, most of my informants argued that his death was suicide. For instance, Gäbrä Selasè Gäbrä Mariam, who met Abära after he returned from the palace, noted that he looked very distraught and emotionally unstable. Moreover, Abreham Mäkonän stressed that Abära had a pistol when they went to the palace and that had created disagreement with the palace guards. He added that, even before they went to the palace, Abära had been talking to some of his colleagues that he planned to kill the emperor; if he refused to accept their demands. His plan was apparently a bluff, but the security agents focused on him as soon as they arrived at the palace; probably, news of the alleged assassination plan might have reached their ears. He further argued that it was the intimidation of the security agents and the appalling condition of workers that apparently tempted him to commit suicide. This assumption is further strengthened by Dawitè Ayana, the wife of Abära Gämu. Dawitè lived with Abära for about nine years. She noted that he was very upset when he came home in the evening of September 3, 1963. She further asserted that after a few minutes, when he tried to take out his pistol from around his waist a shot was heard and soon he began to bleed. Thereafter, she said, I cried and the workers of the fiber factory came to their house as it was located adjacent to the factory and they took him to Balča Hospital, where he died. She believed that it was because of this accident that he lost his life.⁷⁵ Thus, I argue that since the daughter of Abära was below nine years old when he died, what Killion described about the death of Abära by interviewing his daughter is highly suspect.

⁷⁴Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 467.

⁷⁵Informants: Abreham Mäkonän, Gäbrä Selasè Gäbrä Mariam and Dawitè Ayana.

The death of Abära Gämu who was considered as 'the father of the Ethiopian labour movement' shocked all workers in the country. A number of workers attended his funeral which was held in the Church of Ledäta Mariam on 4 September 1963. This militant labour leader was born in Kāmbata *Awraja* in Wuha Gäbäta Qäbällè in 1912. He came to Addis Ababa in search of a better life during the Italian occupation period. He was employed in the Ethiopian fiber factory since its erection. As already described in chapter one, Abära's contribution to the development of the Ethiopian labour movement was immense and unforgettable among many Ethiopian workers. Recently, as a tribute to his exploits, the confederation named its newly established multifaceted training center located at Däbrä Zäyet after him.⁷⁶

Figure 2.5. Abära Gämu and the Training Center named after him



Source: *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 3, No. 50, *Mägabit* 20, 1999EC (March 29, 2007).

⁷⁶*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 3, No. 5, *Mägabit* 20, 1999EC (14March 2007), p. 1.

On the same day Abära was buried, the President and General Secretary of CELU went to *Ras Emru's* house and pleaded with him to mediate between CELU and the emperor. Nevertheless, he reiterated that unless the president of CELU resigned, the emperor was not ready to discuss with the leaders of CELU. Thus, they called the General Council for a meeting on 5 August 1963 (*Nähäse* 30, 1955EC) to decide on Abreham's letter of resignation. After a thorough discussion, the General Council unanimously accepted the resignation of the president and also retracted the 60 day ultimatum. On the same day, the executive committee prepared a letter and sent to the Labour Relations Department of the MNCD indicating the resignation of Abreham as president of CELU and the retraction of the 60 day ultimatum. It stated that:

...አቶ አብርሃም መኮነን የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች ድርጅት አንድነት ማህበር ፕሬዝዳንት ሁነው ሲያገለግሉን መቆይታቸውን እናስታውሳለን። ዳሩግን ነሐሴ 28 ቀን 1955ዓ.ም የማህበሩን ጠቅላላ ጉባኤ በመሰብሰብ ያቀረቡትን ሀሳብ ትክክል ግልባጭ ከዚህ ደብዳቤ ጋር አያይዘን በመላክ ሀሳቡንም ጠቅላላው ጉባኤ የተቀበለው ስለሆነ ከማህበሩ ስራ ውስጥ ያሰናበትናቸው መሆኑን በማክበር እየገለፅን እንዲሁም ሀምሌ 24 ቀን 1955ዓ.ም በቁጥር ሀ11/101/10/55 ለመስሪያቤትዎ የፃፍነውን የሰድሳ /60/ ቀን የስራ ማቆም ማስጠንቀቂያ ደግመን የሰረዘን መሆናችንን በትህትና እናመለክታለን።⁷⁷

...We recall that Mr. Abreham Mäkonän had been serving as president of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions. Nonetheless, he called the General Council for a meeting on 3 September 1963 and submitted a letter of resignation. We are, thus, respectfully notifying you that the General Council accepted his resignation. Likewise, we humbly inform you that we have also cancelled the 60 day ultimatum written to your office with a letter number ሀ11/101/10/55 on 31 July 1963.

Dāmāna Lāmma, Ṭāgayā Abābā and Beyene Solomon presented the letter to the labour tribunal in the labour relations department of the MNCD. Following this development, the government announced the resignation of the president and the withdrawal of the sixty day ultimatum for a general strike issued by CELU on Ethiopian Television. Despite Abreham's resignation, the

⁷⁷CETU, Box No. 42, File No.1, A letter sent from the General Council of CELU to the Labour Relations Department in the MNCD in *Nähäse* 30, 1955 EC (3 September 1963)

leaders of CELU decided to pay his salary until he was employed by the MNCD as an archivist.⁷⁸

Like many government officials who derided CELU's decision of calling a general strike as premature and unwise, Abreham also retrospectively noted that it was a premature one. In retrospect, Beyene Solomon and Gābrä Selassè Gābrä Mariam also argued that Abreham and the whole leadership over estimated the strength of the organization and the consequences of the action. Thus, they noted that they should have handled the matter more skillfully; rather than rushing to call a general strike. Abreham also believed that it could have been possible to handle the problems more delicately than through confrontation. Regardless of his retrospective judgment, however, he still has no regret on his decision because he believed that he did everything for the sake of the workers and the confederation.⁷⁹

Since the 60 day ultimatum of CELU had created panic among government officials, their response to the confederation threat was very repressive. For instance, the officials of the labour relations department in the MNCD and the security agents intimidated the leaders of the confederation into retracting the intended national strike. They also used the government controlled media as an instrument to demonize and defame labour leaders. This finally resulted in the resignation of Abreham as the president of CELU and the retraction of the intended general strike. Moreover, the intimidation and pressure of the government was not confined to the leaders of the confederation; rather it was also extended to the experts of international trade unions who had been giving voluntary service in the confederation. They were considered as

⁷⁸Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 76-77.

⁷⁹Informants: Abreham Mäkonän, Gābrä Selassè Gābrä Mariam and Beyene Solomon.

conspirators who provided illegal advice to the leaders of CELU. Those liberal scholars who clandestinely and publicly supported CELU also stopped their support. State control over CELU began to be strengthened after the aborted general strike.⁸⁰ Thus, I argue that the relationship between the state and the confederation began to follow a new direction. Consequently, CELU's hope to be an autonomous institution eventually disappeared and it was forced to become subservient to the state.

Thomas Killion also argued that "...the debacle of the attempted general strike effectively determined the relations between CELU and the state for the succeeding decade. The illusion of CELU's autonomy was destroyed, and one former leader believed the strike attempt 'probably set CELU back five years' in terms of workers' organization and militant action."⁸¹

Following the aborted general strike, several leaders of local unions stopped participating in the confederation. A number of workers also lost hope in the confederation and refused to pay their annual dues. Consequently, CELU faced serious financial problems. During this period, CELU was greatly weakened both financially and in terms of its institutional legitimacy. The leaders of powerful local unions preferred to consolidate their local power rather than expose themselves to the pressure and intimidation that the state exercised over CELU's leadership. Consequently, the leadership of CELU was transferred from trade unionists to non trade unionists or bureaucrats.⁸²

⁸⁰CETU, Box No. 42, File No.1, A letter written by the General Council of CELU to the labour relations department in the MNCD on *Nähäse* 30, 1955EC (3 September 1963)

⁸¹Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 467.

⁸²Informants: Abära Abäbä and Gëtačäw Mängäša.

2.5. CELU under Crisis, 1964-74

Immediately after the resignation of Abreham, CELU was thrown in organizational crisis in general and in a leadership vacuum in particular. Even though the Board of CELU decided the tasks of the president's office were to be covered by Zäläqä Wäldä Mariam, the vice-president, and Beyene Solomon, the Secretary General, until the next election period, it did not go as expected since the former was working outside Addis Ababa (in Dire Dawa textile factory) and CELU had no budget to pay him. Above all, Zäläqä was sentenced to three years imprisonment on account of attacking Tadässä Bezunäh, a liaison officer in Dire Dawa textile factory.⁸³ The Board also passed an immediate and crucial decision on the membership fee collection system. So far, every member union collected 3birr from each member annually. In order to solve the financial crisis of CELU, the Board decided that the membership fee should be collected three times a year. Even then, CELU could not solve its financial crisis.⁸⁴ Beyene described the crisis of CELU and the responsibility of leading CELU given to him as follows:

...After his resignation, Abreham continued to draw his former salary without working. Zelleqe Wolde Mariam, the vice president had to return to Dire Dawa because that was his work place, so the burden of the presidency fell squarely on me. This problem was exacerbated because one of the assistant secretaries, Hailu A'ga did not bother to show up at the CELU office after his election while the second one was dismissed by the executive committee for poor conduct. Furthermore, some of the member unions failed to live up to their commitments for paying their monthly dues. Consequently, CELU was not able to pay the salaries of the recruited office staff, Abreham and myself. We were also unable to pay 'pocket money' to the two university students, Gebre Selassie Gebre Mariam and Mesfin Gebre Michael, who have been assisting us in organizing and coordinating our activities. In order to address this acute financial problem I proposed that all salaries be reduced by half, and with immediate effect.⁸⁵

⁸³*Voice of Labour*, Vol. III, No. 48, *Mäskäräm* 30, 1999 EC (10 October 2006), p. 14.

⁸⁴Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel I*, 1976 EC, p. 71.

⁸⁵Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 77-78.

Moreover, the newly assigned leaders of CELU preferred to use personal appeal to the emperor which was already guaranteed by the constitution, instead of democratic organization and action as a mechanism to get their demands heard and addressed. In doing so, CELU dropped its organizational ideals to be an independent trade union and came under the control of the state. The leaders of CELU began to demonstrate their loyalty to the emperor on different occasions. For instance, they went to the palace on 9 January 1964 and expressed their gratitude for the role that the emperor played in the promulgation of Proclamation No. 210/1963 on 1 November 1963. Moreover, they also went to the palace on 15 February 1964 and showed their solidarity to the emperor against the government of Somalia. They read to the emperor the letter that they wrote to the prime minister of Somalia, Abdirashid Ali Shermarke. In the letter, they stated that all the 50, 000 members of CELU were determined to defend the sovereignty of the country. Following this, Beyene was immediately assigned as a member of the fund raising committee chaired by *Däjazmač* Kefelè Eregätu for the defense of the Ogaden region of the country from the invasion of Somalia.⁸⁶

On the other hand, the decision of Beyene and his supporters was not accepted by the militant workers and leaders of local unions who were working to make CELU an independent and strong confederation. The leaders of local unions stopped paying their dues to the confederation; rather they continued to strengthen their own union. They also continued to praise Abreham Mäkonän and Abära Gämu, who had sacrificed themselves for the cause of CELU. This opposition, eventually, resulted in the outbreak of a series of internal power struggles for control

⁸⁶Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 E.C/2012), pp. 86-87.

of CELU. This internal power struggle in turn created good opportunity for the government to strengthen its control over CELU by manipulating their differences.⁸⁷

Besides expressing their loyalty to the MNCD and the emperor, the leaders of CELU (Beyene Solomon and his colleagues) continued to strengthen their relationship with international trade unions to get the confederation out of crisis. For instance, CELU received some grant from ICFTU and hired two university graduates, Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam and Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaël, who had completed their education in July 1964, on fulltime basis by paying each 500 birr. In September 1964, before they left for USA to continue their studies sponsored by AALC, they brought two of their colleagues, Fesseha Şeyon Täkiè and Täsfa Gäbrä Mariam to take over their position in CELU. The coming of these four university graduates boosted the critical need for qualified personnel in CELU. As soon as they were employed, they began to serve as interpreters, advisers and educators for the leaders of CELU. Moreover, they were assigned to teach workers to raise their consciousness about trade unionism through newsletters (*Voice of Labour*), film shows and educational material.⁸⁸

Moreover, the executive committee of CELU, in cooperation with ICFTU, organized a two week seminar to the leaders of local unions at Haile Selassie I University from September 4-18, 1963. The seminar was given by two ICFTU labour experts, Howard Robinson and Ivan Gore, and prominent scholars from HSIU and the bureaucracy.⁸⁹ The seminar was apparently organized to approach local union leaders who had begun to withdraw after the resignation of Abreham and challenge the new leadership.

⁸⁷Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", pp. 467-468.

⁸⁸Informants: Beyene Solomon, Fesseha Şeyon Täkiè and Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam.

⁸⁹*Voice of Labour*, Vol. I, No. 4, *Nähäse* 18, 1955EC (24 August 1963), p. 9.

The first serious challenge to Beyene's administration came in 1964 from Alämu Bogalä, assistance secretary and legal officer of CELU. Alämu began to conspire against Beyene while the latter was attending the 48th General Conference of ILO in Geneva in June 1964. It was in his absence that Alämu tried to remove Beyene from office by organizing his supporters into a committee that would investigate and charge the secretary general with incompetence and lack of constituency (trade union). A number of smaller unions such as Mitchell Cotts Company Workers' Union, Besse Company Workers' Union, Ethiopian Fiber Factory Workers' Union and Ethiopian Airlines Workers' Union supported his idea and worked to remove the secretary general. But, Alämu failed to convince the leaders of large industrial unions like the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers' union, Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Estate Workers' Union, Diabaco Cotton Factory Workers' Union and others which represented the majority of CELU members. The leaders of these large industrial unions gave their support to Beyene because he provided them with short term training which was allocated on the basis of membership. As a result, he was able to control the president position with the support of these unions in the General Assembly in three subsequent elections. When the committee failed to remove Beyene, Alämu continued to try to convince the leaders of large industrial unions not to give their vote to Beyene in the 1957 election. Nevertheless, Beyene and his colleagues discovered the plot and fired him before the election under the pretext of disciplinary problems.⁹⁰

But, one can argue that Beyene's crude description of the dismissal of Alämu by the executive committee for 'poor conduct' was merely a cover.⁹¹ The conflict between Alämu and Beyene set the pattern of conflict in the confederation in the years to come. Since Alämu was an educated

⁹⁰*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1975 EC, p. 7; Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 474.

⁹¹Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p. 77.

person, for instance, his principal supporters were white collars workers. White collar workers were more militant, politically active and progressive in the struggle against the management and the state. On the other hand, the majority of blue collar workers and the leaders of CELU became complacent after some economic changes were introduced by the imperial government.⁹²

After the dismissal of Alämu Bogalä, Beyene and the four university graduates consolidated their control over CELU's administration. This was clearly observed in the second election of the leaders of CELU which was held on 8 April 1965. Before the election, the General Assembly, which comprised one hundred delegates, unanimously agreed to make some amendments on the constitution of CELU. As a result, the two years term of office was changed into four years for the officers of CELU. Accordingly, Beyene Solomon was elected as president, Aläm Abdi as vice president and Fesseha Şeyon Täkiè as secretary general. Täsfa Gäbrä Mariam and Mäsfen Dämsè were also elected as assistant secretaries. Moreover, Ibrahim Ahmäd was elected as treasurer, Däjänè Mäkonän, assistant treasurer, and Abära Abäbä and Wärqu Agäñähu as auditors. Before the election, some participants of the General Assembly urged the meeting to exclude those candidates whose unions were in arrears and those who represented no union. Despite the opposition of those trade union leaders, however, Fesseha Şeyon Täkiè and Täsfa Gäbrä Mariam were elected as secretary general and assistant secretary of CELU.⁹³

In doing so, Beyene and his supporters breached Article 6/c which restricted the participation of union members in arrears in the General Council and Article 20/b which forbade the participation of workers who did not have a union of the CELU's constitution. Interestingly

⁹²Abära Abäbä, "Yä Mozvold Säratäñoč Anäsas," A Personal Record, 1996 EC (2004), pp. 2-3; Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 474.

⁹³*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1975 EC, p.7.

enough, the MNCD and the international labour experts who were working with CELU did not oppose the election of university graduates who did not represent any union affiliated to CELU.⁹⁴ They were apparently employed in the headquarters of CELU as professional experts, not appointed as trade unionists to lead the confederation. Even though they were employed to fill the professionals' gap in the confederation, they eventually transformed themselves as leaders of the labour unions in the country. They manipulated the low educational background of Beyene Solomon and dominated the leadership of CELU until the eve of the 1974 revolution. Since they were subordinate with the state, they did not face opposition from the emperor. Nevertheless, they were at the center of the trade unionists' strong and critical stand until the end of the imperial regime.

Figure 2.6. Labour Bureaucrats from 1965-1973



Source: Beyene Solomon, *Yä Ityopiya Säratäñöč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 E.C), p.167.

⁹⁴The First Constitution of CELU, April 9, 1963, p.4.

A year after the election, GäbräSelassè Gäbrä Mariam and Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaël returned from the USA with a Masters Degree in Economics and were appointed as legal and economic head and education and information head respectively. Accordingly, they became members of CELU's executive committee. Therefore, one can argue that, after 1965, CELU's leadership was virtually dominated by men who did not represent any local union. Even, the constituency of the president himself was not fully accepted by militant white collar workers. Nevertheless, his relationship with the emperor and his officials, and international trade unions helped him to defeat his opponents. Moreover, even though some members of the General Assembly opposed the election of the two university graduates who were not represented by any trade union, Beyene convinced the General Assembly to approve the position of university graduates by underscoring the indispensable role they played in the establishment of CELU. He also silenced some prominent critics by providing opponents a three month to one year training abroad. In 1965, for instance, 13 workers were sent to Kampala labour college, 10 to West Germany, 2 to Switzerland and 3 to Egypt. He used international scholarship and training as important weapons to keep his opponents away from CELU.⁹⁵

Be that as it may, some militant white collar workers continued to raise question on the ethnic composition of CELU's leadership. They opposed the domination of CELU by Tegräña speakers (Eritreans and Tegreans). Since labour bureaucrats such as Fesseha Şeyon, Mäsfen and Gäbrä Selasè including the president were from Eritrea and Tegray their ethnic solidarity aroused suspicions among the other workers. For instance, the issue of ethnicity was at the center of the

⁹⁵*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1975, p.7.

3rd and 4th election of CELU conducted in 1967 and 1971 respectively. Thus, internal power struggle characterized CELU for a decade after 1963.⁹⁶

To balance the ethnic struggle in the General Council and General Assembly, Beyene organized the Eritrean workers and brought them into CELU in September 1966. In fact, trade unions' activities in Eritrea had been temporarily stopped by the imperial government for fear of the upsurge of instability in the region following the termination of the Federal Act on 14 November 1962. But, when he organized the Eritrean workers, Beyene promised Gètahun Tässäma, minister of MNCD, that he would organize them only in line with the interest of the government and it would also be a plus for the government's effort to pacify the region. Besides the minister of MNCD, Lt. Mikaël Amädè, Director General of the Labour Department in the MNCD and Emeru Zäläqä who was then working for a Bulgarian Company in Eritrea helped Beyene in convincing *Leul Ras* Asrätä Kassa, the Emperor's *Endärasè* in Eritrea. Accordingly, Beyene was allowed to organize the Eritrean workers in accordance with the 1962 labour relations decree. Thus, he was able to convince the Eritrean workers to drop the 1958 Labour Relations Act and get organized under 29 unions. The confederation also organized a seminar for the newly elected local union leaders together with other leaders from the rest of Ethiopia in Asmara on 26 November 1966.⁹⁷ Following the seminar, a CELU branch office was opened in Eritrea under the leadership of Amanuël Kahsay who was the leader of Qañäw workers' union. CELU also helped it in developing bylaws. Within a year the branch office boasted a total of 46 affiliated

⁹⁶Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 475; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel I*, 1976 EC, p. 71.

⁹⁷Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 94-95; *Voice of Labour*, A special Brochure prepared on the occasion of the 5th CELU annual conference and Anniversary, *Mägabit* 28, 1960 EC (April 6, 1968), p.19.

unions with a membership of 15,000.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, I argue that though many of the Eritrean workers were in favor of Beyene until he left CELU in 1974, there were also individual Eritreans who opposed his sycophantic relationship with government officials. Yet, apart from helping him to control power, Eritrean workers' organizations could not stop the internal power struggle in the confederation.

On the other hand, the opening of a branch office of CELU in Asmara also sparked opposition from union leaders in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Even though it was opened in accordance with Article 13 of the constitution of CELU, it created grievances among the local unions in the rest of Ethiopia who did not have such a CELU branch. Consequently, a similar branch was opened in Dire Dawa nearly a year after. But, the demand for a branch office by local unions in and around Addis Ababa was not met until 1971. This aggravated the relationship between the leaders of CELU and local unions in Addis Ababa and its environs. During the 3rd and 4th election, representatives of local unions in and around Addis Ababa raised the question of a branch to the General Assembly. Some militant white collar workers even pushed their demand further into establishing a separate confederation in the country. When the challenge increased from time to time, CELU opened another branch in Addis Ababa in 1971.⁹⁹

Meanwhile, Beyene and his colleagues tried to attract local unions/ enterprise based unions by raising the major pressing demands of workers to the government. For instance, they requested the MNCD on 10 March 1966 to amend some of the major provisions of the existing labour laws of the country. Among other things, Articles related to the right to strike, freedom of association,

⁹⁸CETU, Box No. 26, File No. 02, the bylaws of CELU's branch in Eritrea.

⁹⁹*Voice of Labour*, Vol. VIII, No. 3, *Hämlè*, 1963 EC, p. 6.

health insurance, pension, collective bargaining, warning and termination, severance pay, and minimum wage needed to be amended.¹⁰⁰ But, the ministry failed to amend any of the articles requested by the leaders of CELU. Consequently, the General Council which met from 6 to 9 April 1968 proposed basic modifications to the existing laws. More importantly, it decided to point out major articles of the Civil Code and Proclamation No. 210/1963 that needed urgent amendment. Nevertheless, this attempt also proved fruitless because the government did not take any action to improve the labour proclamation.¹⁰¹

On the other hand, Beyene and the four were reelected in 1967. Moreover, the Vice-President position was also taken by Wäldätänsay Täklä Haymanot, the leader of A. Bèsse Company Workers' Union. This election further strengthened the domination of CELU by Tegräñña speakers. The disproportionate ethnic composition of the leadership of CELU continued to create rift among member unions in the rest of Ethiopia. As a result, it affected the unity and strength of the confederation. Apart from this, the leaders of CELU were criticized in the General Assembly for their failure to solve the persistent demands of workers. For instance, in its annual labour conference held at the Chamber of Commerce building on 1 May 1969, several delegates referred to CELU as "a bridge between the government and the labour force" which failed to carry out its responsibilities properly. The leaders of the confederation were also rebuked for their poor communication between labour and the state.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰*Voice of Labour*, A Special Broacher prepared on the occasion of the 5th CELU annual conference and Anniversary, *Mägabit* 28, 1960 EC (6 April 1968), pp .6-8; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 73.

¹⁰¹Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p .73.

¹⁰²Ethiopian Herald, 2 May 1969 (*Miyazeya* 24, 1961); Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State....," p. 476.

The leaders of member unions and workers continued to express their grievances against the leaders of CELU for their failure to communicate their demands to the state and improve their living conditions. This continuous opposition forced the leaders to call a General Council meeting from November 22 to 24, 1969, to discuss the possible action to be taken against the government. They proposed three actions: to stage a demonstration on the following Sunday; to carry out a national work stoppage for 5 minutes; or to undertake a national work stoppage for 24 hours. After they discussed the three options, the participants agreed to go on strike on 7 January 1970, Ethiopian Christmas day. Accordingly, they sent a letter on 24 November 1969 indicating their decision to the MNCD and to the Ministry of Interior. Moreover, the General Council decided to withdraw labour representatives from the various committees organized in the MNCD including the Labour Relations Board.¹⁰³

In the meantime, the emperor set up an imperial enquiry committee composed of Zäwdè Gäbrähiwät, Minister of Interior; Yelema Dārëssa, Minister of Finance; Gètahun Tässäma, Minister of National Community Development, and Dr. Seyum Harägot, State minister in the Prime Minister's office to study the problem and propose possible solutions. The imperial inquiry committee met with the executive committee of CELU on 1 January 1970 and discussed the outstanding problems of workers. After the meeting, the imperial inquiry committee agreed to study the problem and propose appropriate solutions for all the problems raised by the executive committee of CELU. It also promised to amend Proclamation No. 210/1963. On their part, the leaders of CELU retracted the intended strike. Nevertheless, despite workers' persistent call for the improvement of labour laws, the government continued to give very little attention to the

¹⁰³Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 80.

demands of workers.¹⁰⁴ Thus, one can argue that the threat to call a general strike by the leaders of CELU was apparently a bluff intentionally made to cool down the workers' grievances against them. But, the government's indifference to workers' demands and the failure of the leadership to undertake the Christmas strike further aggravated the workers' grievances against the leadership and the state.

In the meantime, many high school and university graduates began to join the work force and this in turn enhanced the number of militant white collar workers who had been struggling to make CELU strong and independent. The newly recruited white collar workers brought to the labour unions the combination of nationalist and socialist ideals from the student movement. They opposed the subservient leaders of CELU and the conservative management and state machinery forthright. Despite the growing of opposition forces against the leaders of CELU, Beyene and the four university graduates were also reelected for the fourth term election of CELU in April 1971, and continued to dominate the confederation. Since they were not trade unionist, they did not feel the pain as much as the workers did. Consequently, the momentum of the opposition grew to the extent of floating the idea of creating a new confederation. This was orchestrated by some 30 trade unions in and around Addis Ababa and Eritrea. But, they were denied permission by the MNCD.¹⁰⁵

The leaders of CELU tried to cool down the opposition in and around Addis Ababa by opening a branch office in May 1971. It was the third branch office of CELU, besides the branch offices formerly established in Asmara and Dire Dawa. It was opened to serve the workers in and

¹⁰⁴Yä Mälaw Itēyopiya Säratāñoč Mahebär, "Yä Itēyopiya Säratāñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 83; Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp.116-117.

¹⁰⁵Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", pp. 478-479.

around Addis Ababa and encourage the unorganized workers to organize and join the national confederation. It was also responsible for collecting monthly dues and submitting them to the confederation and studying the problems of workers in and around Addis Ababa. A committee of five workers led by Gëtačäw Asmarä was set up to run the office.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, since it was not organized in timely manner, it could not address the grievances of workers to the satisfaction of the leaders of CELU.

On the other hand, the problems of workers in Eritrea were also aggravated by power struggle between the supporters of Beyene and his opponent, Mäsfen Abräha. Their difference was more personal and to some extent ideological. Beyene often tried to appoint his favorite man to lead the Eritrean branch office against the will of the majority of the workers. For instance, he supported Amanuël Kahsay to continue as president of the Eritrean branch office in the fourth term election. But, the majority of workers elected Mäsfen instead of Amanuël in April 1971. The election of Mäsfen was not accepted by Beyene, who convinced the executive committee of CELU to remove him from office. However, because of his popular support he was reinstated by the CELU general assembly in April 1972.¹⁰⁷ Beyene opposed the election of Mäsfen apparently because he was suspected of having strong link with the armed struggle in Eritrea.

The struggle of workers began to show momentum in 1972 and 1973. For instance, the General Council which met from 11 to 13 February 1972 decided that unless all the promises of the government implemented they would present the case to the General Assembly in the next

¹⁰⁶*Voice of Labour*, Vol. VIII, No. 3, *Hämlè* 1963, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p.479.

meeting.¹⁰⁸ State employees in agriculture and essential services began to demand freedom of association. Accordingly, the government promised to amend Proclamation No.210/1963 to provide freedom of association for some government offices. Emboldened by the workers' struggle and the promises provided by the government, CELU also began to organize government employees at different offices. Nevertheless, this did not stop the internal power struggle in CELU. The state which was also in crisis because of the outbreak of devastating famine in the northern part of the country began to make concessions with labour to stop strikes. But, the leaders of CELU did not believe that the state was in the process of collapsing in late 1973 and continued their subordination to it. They were working to get concessions from the government; rather than to lead the workers' struggle for a dramatic change.¹⁰⁹ Thus, I argue that the strong subordination of the leaders of CELU to the state and the enduring internal power struggle contributed a lot to the failure of the Ethiopian labour movement to be an agent for the 1974 Ethiopian revolution.

2.6. The Role of the State in CELU's Foreign Relations

The imperial Ethiopian government supported CELU whenever it tried to establish relationship with international trade unions. One can even argue that it was the government in the name of the Ethiopian workers that began foreign relations with International Labour Organization (ILO) when Ethiopia became a member on 28 September 1923.¹¹⁰ The relationship was created simultaneously along with the imperial government's grand effort to gain international recognition for the country. To gain international recognition for his nation, *Ras Tāfāri Mākonān*,

¹⁰⁸ CETU, Box No. 48, File No. 1, A letter sent from CELU to the Prime Minister office, MNCD and Ministry of Interior on 17 February 1972. It requested for the amendment of the labour law.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 481.

¹¹⁰ <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11003:::NO::>

the then regent and heir to the throne applied to join the League of Nations in 1919, but the application was rejected on the pretext of the existence of slavery, slave trade and arms trade in the country. Nevertheless, following the introduction of some reforms addressing the concerns of member nations, Ethiopia was admitted to the League of Nations by unanimous vote on 28 September 1923.¹¹¹ Since ILO was one of the agencies of the League of Nations, Ethiopia also became a member of ILO automatically when it joined the League of Nations.

Following his diplomatic achievement, *Ras Täfäri* made his grand tour to Europe in 1924. In fact, he undertook an extensive foreign tour not only to Europe but also to other countries. En route, he also visited Palestine and Egypt. While he was in Switzerland, *Ras Täfäri* visited the League of Nations and nearby agencies including the ILO on 28 July 1924.¹¹² Perhaps, it was during this tour that the regent heard for the first time about the importance of labour unions for the socio-economic development of the country from the Director General of ILO.

Even though ILO persistently urged the imperial Ethiopian government to ratify fundamental conventions, recommendations and protocols of the organization, its contribution during the establishment of CELU on 9 April 1963 was insignificant. Nevertheless, the relationship between them came to be further strengthened following CELU's participation in the 47th General Conference of ILO in June 1963. CELU was represented by its leader, Abreham Mäkonän. After the conference, while the representatives of the government and employers' association came back home, Abreham stayed over in Europe for more than a month to strengthen CELU's relationship with ILO, international trade unions and national trade unions.

¹¹¹Theodore M. Vestal, *The Lion of Judah in the New World: Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and the Shaping of American's Attitudes toward Africa* (Denver: Praeger, 2011) pp. 21-22.

¹¹²Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), p. 121; Haile Selassie I, *Hiwotè ena Yä Iteyopiya Ermeja, (Berhan ena Sälam Qädamawi Haile Selassie Matämiya Bèt, 1965)*, p. 89.

He visited, for instance, Italy, France, Belgium, Austria and Yugoslavia and discussed with the leaders of national trade unions on how they could support CELU. Moreover, he also managed to talk to the leaders of international trade unions like ICFTU and AFL-CIO concerning the progress of CELU. This opened an opportunity for CELU to strengthen its foreign relations.¹¹³

The emperor also allowed ILO to convene the second African regional conference of the ILO in Addis Ababa on 30 November 1964. The conference was opened by Emperor Haile Selassie I and attended by a total of over 350 delegates from 33 African countries. In the conference, the government expressed its commitment to implement ILO's conventions and recommendations and improve the situation of labour in the country. The emperor also made extensive discussions with David A. Morse, Director General of ILO and with other African labour leaders and representative concerning the condition of labour in the country.¹¹⁴ In addition, an agreement was signed between the Imperial Ethiopian Government and the organization to establish an office for the ILO in Addis Ababa. The agreement was signed by Mamo Tadässä, State Minister in the Prime Minister's office and Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Ethiopian Government and by Mr. David A. Morse, Director General of the ILO on 10 December 1964.¹¹⁵

¹¹³IES/MS 38/18, p. 7; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, *Hämlè* 1, 1955EC, p. 2.

¹¹⁴Ethiopian Herald, November 29, 1964 (*Hedar*, 20, 1957EC); December 3, 1964 (*Hedar* 24, 1957)

¹¹⁵Ethiopian Herald, 11 December 1964; *Addis Zämän*, *Tahesas* 2, 1957 EC.

Figure 2.7. The Imperial Ethiopian Government and International Labour Organization Signing an Agreement.



Source: *Addis Zämān*, Vol. 24, No. 294, *Tahesas 2*, 1957EC (December 11, 1964)

The Imperial Ethiopian Government also contributed its part to strengthen CELU's relations with international trade unions. Even though the government had pro-west inclination, it was not driven by ideology of any sort. Thus, it created a platform for CELU to strengthen its relationship with both pro-west and pro-east international trade unions. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), African-American Labour Center, inter alia, were pro-west trade unions. CELU also had relationship with pro-east trade unions like, World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Pro- labour union foundation established by the

Geman Social Democratic Party), and Bulgaria trade unions though it was not as strong as the pro-west.¹¹⁶

As stated earlier, ICFTU played an important role in the establishment of CELU in 1963. Even though the Ethiopian workers had begun contact with ICFTU with the help of a few 'liberal' scholars, it was with the intervention of the government that ICFTU came to support CELU in training, material and finance. Even before the workers began to have contact with ICFTU, the emperor and his officials had already met Tom Mboya, the representative of ICFTU in Eastern, Southern and Central Africa, and discussed the importance of organized labour for the socio-economic development of the country on 3 October 1958. It was during that time that the ICFTU promised to support the Ethiopian workers, if the emperor allowed them to get organized.¹¹⁷

Thus, the actual relationship between the Ethiopian workers and ICFTU was started when ICFTU sent two labour experts, Howard T. Robinson and D. Ramanujam to Ethiopia and organized a seminar for Ethiopian workers on various issues of labour. The seminar was organized for forty workers' representatives who came from 33 different enterprises. It was officially opened by Gètahun Täsäma, Minister of MNCD and lasted from March 4-16, 1962 (*Yäkatit* 25 to *Mägabit* 7, 1954 EC). It was also after this seminar that CELU was organized and also automatically affiliated to ICFTU.¹¹⁸ In his speech during the opening of the seminar, D. Ramanujam praised the readiness of the government to work with ICFTU and improve the condition of labour in the country. On behalf of the ICFTU, he expressed his sincere indebtedness to the imperial Ethiopian government for creating conducive environment for

¹¹⁶Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 84-85.

¹¹⁷Ethiopian Herald, October 4, 1958; October 11, 1958.

¹¹⁸*Addis Zämän*, *Yäkatit*, 26, 1955 EC; *Mägabit* 9, 1955 EC; *Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, 9 April 1970 (*Miyaziya* 1, 1962 EC), p. 17.

ICFTU which came to support the Ethiopian workers. D. Ramanujam also mentioned that ICFTU was ready to help the development of Ethiopian labour unions in accordance with their request and in compliance with the laws of the imperial government.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, the government allowed ICFTU's labour experts to come to Ethiopia and support CELU mainly in the labour education department. They provided a series of seminars not only to the leaders of CELU but also to the leaders and members of local unions of various plants.¹²⁰

The emperor continued to strengthen the relationship between ICFTU and CELU by allowing ICFTU to organize its 4th African Regional Conference in Africa Hall, Addis Ababa, from April 8-12, 1964 (*Mägabit* 30-*Miyazeya* 4, 1956 EC). Around 100 workers' representatives from 33 different African countries attended the conference. In his welcoming speech, the emperor expressed that his government was committed to work with ICFTU and other sister African trade unions. He also stressed that: "...ስለተሰባሰባችሁበት ጉዳይ ስትነጋገሩ የአፍሪካ መንግስታት መሪዎች በዚህ አዳራሽ ተሰብስበን ስለ አፍሪካ አንድነት ባደረግነው ቃል ኪዳን ላይ በተመለከቱት ዓላማዎች እንደምትመሩ ጽኑ ተስፋ አለን።" Moreover, at the end of the conference, the emperor invited the participants to an official dinner at Giyon Hotel.¹²¹ The relationship between ICFTU and CELU reached its peak when Bāyānā Solomon was elected vice president of the former in 1965.¹²² Thus, I argue that the role of the government in the relationship between CELU and ICFTU was very significant.

¹¹⁹Ethiopian Herald, 5 March 1963 (*Yäkatit* 26, 1955 EC), p. 3.

¹²⁰*Voice of Labour*, Vol. I, No. 4, 24 August 1963 (*Nähasè* 18, 1955 EC).

¹²¹*Mänän* Bulletin Vol. 8, No. 7, *Miyazeya* 1956 EC (April 1964), p. 21.

¹²²"...We strongly hope that when you discuss the agenda of your conference, you will be guided by the objectives enshrined in the constitution of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that the African Heads of State ratified in this same hall." See also Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 84-85.

Figure 2.8. Gètahun Tässäma opening the 4th ICFTU- African Regional Conference in Africa Hall.



Source: *Mänän Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 7, *Miyazeya* 1956 EC (April 1964), p. 21.

The government also supported the relationship between CELU and the African American Labour Center (AALC), an auxiliary of the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). After a thorough discussion between the emperor and Irving Brown, Director of AALC, it opened the AALC-East African Regional Office in Addis Ababa in April 1968; and Jerry Funk was appointed as its first director from 1968-73. True, before CELU established relationship with AALC, Maida Springer of the AALC visited Ethiopia and discussed with the leaders of CELU. Her visit created the basis for mutual understanding of the two organizations. Apart from this, the AALC rendered some financial support to CELU.¹²³

¹²³*Ibid.*, p.84.

Figure 2.9. H.I.M. Emperor Haile Selassie I Talking to Mr. Irving Brown, Director of AALC.



Source: Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...* p. 145.

The AALC was formed in 1965 by AFL-CIO to support the development of African labour unions and contain the influence of international labour unions with communist orientation in Africa. Through AALC, besides working on matters of its own concern, the AFL-CIO reported that it rendered valuable assistance to Africa's economic development and the strengthening of its emerging democratic institutions. It also supported workers' struggle for the liberation of Africa along side the nationalist movements in Africa.¹²⁴

The relationship between CELU and AALC was further strengthened after AALC constructed a two story building office for CELU in Addis Ababa. The new headquarters was built with the aid of AALC and was designed to fit the needs of CELU. It was hoped to provide enough offices for the different departments and to avail services that would assure a proper work flow for the

¹²⁴Collin Gonze, "American Labor and Africa," *Africa Today*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Spring, 1972, pp. 33-35; Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4185231>

organization. It was also hoped to serve as a symbol of a united active labour force that worked to build a better future.¹²⁵

It was constructed near the former Mexico square on 2000 square meters of land graciously donated by the emperor. The corner stone of the building was laid down by the emperor on 9 April 1968. The AALC spent about E\$623, 885.88 birr to finish the building. The work was started after a year on 9 April 1969 and inaugurated in the presence of the Emperor, government officials and representatives of ICFTU and AALC on 9 April 1970.¹²⁶

Besides the building, AALC continued to provide material and financial assistance to CELU until 1974. A number of AALC labour experts also came to Ethiopia at different times and organized seminars for Ethiopian workers. More importantly, it contributed a lot in the organization of a vocational training center for Ethiopian workers inside Täfäri Mäkonän secondary school in April 1968.¹²⁷ It also provided scholarship for CELU officers and workers. For instance, AALC granted a Masters Degree scholarship for two CELU officers, Gäbrä Selasè Gebremaiam and Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaël in September 1964.¹²⁸

¹²⁵*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, April 9, 1970 (*Miyazeya* 1, 1962 EC), p.7.

¹²⁶*Voice of Labour*, Vol. VII, No. 4, August 1969 (*Nähäsè* 1961 EC), p. 4. ; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya...*, p. 103; *Voice of Labour*, Vol.III, No. 49, *Tahesas* 5, 1999EC, p.16.

¹²⁷*Voice of Labour*, Vol. VII, No. 3, July 15, 1969 (*Hämlè* 8, 1961EC), pp. 5-6.

¹²⁸CETU, Box No. 48, File No. 04. A letter sent from Lt. Mikaël Amdè, labour director in the MNCD to CELU on *Genbot* 19, 1956 EC (27 May 1964). It stated that the Ministry expressed its support to the scholarship provided to CELU by the AALC.

Figure 2.10. Emperor Haile Selassie I and Beyene Solomon Inaugurating CELU's First Headquarters.



Source: *Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, 9 April 1970.

CELU also got state support to strengthen its relations with the Organization of African Trade Unions Unity (OATUU). It was following the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on 25 May 1963 that the leaders of spontaneously organized African trade unions aspired to establish a continent wide confederation of trade unions. The Labour Commission of the OAU made significant effort in this regard, but it took a decade to see OATTU established. It, for instance, sponsored all African trade union organizations to meet under one roof and deliberate on the issue of Pan-African workers unity from April 6-14, 1973 for the first time in the continent's history.¹²⁹ The African Trade Unions Confederation (ATUC) with its head office

¹²⁹ Ethiopian Herald, 5 April 1973.

in Dakar and the All African Trade Union Federation headquartered in Dar-es-Salaam also attended the meeting.¹³⁰

In his opening address, His Excellency Lt. Mikael Amädè, state minister in the MNCD, praised the role that those trade unions played in the struggle for liberation and urged them to continue the fight as a united front. In addition, "...he wished that Africa Hall, the very birth-place of African Unity in 1963, will again witness the ceremonies for yet another solemn oath for a pan-African Trade Union organization." He also added that the Ethiopian workers were ready to work with the new organization. The meeting unanimously elected the secretary general of CELU, Fesseha Şeyon Täkiè, as chairman of the constituent congress in which all affiliates of the pro-west; ATUC and the pro-east; All-Africa Trades Union Federation (AATUF) and other independent unions were represented to discuss the draft constitution.¹³¹ The Emperor granted an audience to the participants of the All African Trade Unions conference on 13 April in 1973. Representing the participants, Dennis Akumu of Kenya and Lacine Sill of Guinea-Conakry praised him for his dedication to the cause of African unity and also for his determined efforts to bring peace and happiness for Africa. They also extended their gratitude to the Emperor for the wise counsel he gave them and the warm hospitality given by the government and people of Ethiopia for the participants of the conference. The emperor on his part praised African labour unions for their fortitude and unity of purpose in the fight against reactionary forces in the continent's struggle for total liberation and called upon African trade unions to intensify their

¹³⁰International Labour Organization, *Labour Education* (Geneva: International Labour Office, No. 43, 1980/82), p. 5.

¹³¹Ethiopian Herald, 7 April 1973.

efforts not only to protect the immediate interests of their members but also to go beyond that narrow path and work for the progress and welfare of the people of Africa as a whole.¹³²

Figure 2.11. Emperor Haile Selassie I, Posing with Participants of the African Trade Unions Conference.



Source: Ethiopian Herald, 14 April 1973 (*Miyazeya* 6, 1965 EC)

At the end of the conference, delegates of 29 of the 33 African countries decided to establish the Organization of African Trade Union Unity. They also agreed that the headquarters of the new organization be in Accra, Ghana. On the other hand, trade union delegates from Senegal, Mauritania, Mali and Tunisia refused to sign the charter of the organization. But, the signatories of the charter of OATUU elected Lacine Silla of Guinea president of the new organization and Dennis Akumu of Kenya its Secretary General. The meeting also elected five vice presidents, including Beyene Solomon, president of CELU, from Ethiopia and other vice presidents from

¹³²Ethiopian Herald, 14 April 1973 (*Miyazeya* 6, 1965 EC); *Addis Zämän*, *Miyazeya* 6, 1965 EC (14 April 1973)

Niger, Togo, Morocco and Cameroun.¹³³ Like the OAU, OATUU aimed at liberating African people from the yoke of colonialism. The opening preamble of the Constitution urged trade unions to support governments. It stated that:

...The role of the African Trade Union Movement shall therefore be economic, political, cultural and social and undertake all economic actions in order to liberate Africa from the structures of exploitation that have been transplanted and established on the continent and especially encourage agrarian reform and industrialization. It is therefore, necessary that Africa trade unionists participate not only in the implementation but also at the conception stages and the control of work programs of the plans drawn up by African governments for the attainment of these objectives.¹³⁴

Though the imperial Ethiopian government had a pro-west policy in the 1960s, it was not driven by ideology. This helped the leaders of CELU to visit any countries in the world and seek assistance from them irrespective of their ideological orientation. True, CELU had stronger relationship with international trade unions based in the West than in the East. But, even though the relationship between CELU and international trade unions based in the East was not as strong as that of the West, it tried to accommodate both. For instance, CELU was also invited to attend the 1964 May Day celebrations of the Soviet Workers' Union in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Beyene Solomon attended the event with no problem from the government side.¹³⁵ This was not, however, the case for many African trade unions. Their foreign relations were guided by the ideological lines which were advocated and adopted by their governments.¹³⁶

¹³³Ethiopian Herald, 14 April 1973 (*Miyazya* 6, 1965 EC) ; *Addis Zāmān*, *Miyazeya* 6, 1965 EC; Vol. 32, No. 90, *Miyazeya* 7, 1965 EC)

¹³⁴Kwame Ocloo, "African Unions Time for a Rethink," *International Union Rights*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1998, pp. 6-7; Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41935633>.

¹³⁵Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p. 85.

¹³⁶Roger Scott, "Are Trade Unions Still Necessary in Africa?" *Transition*, No. 33, October-November, 1967, pp. 27-31; .Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2934112>.

Conclusion

Most of the Ethiopian workers were not yet formally organized until 1962. The Franco-Ethiopian Railway workers who established their union under the good will of Emperor Haile Selassie I had not yet even received legal recognition. In 1962, however, both exogenous and endogenous factors induced the imperial Ethiopian government to issue a labour relations decree or Decree No.49/1962 and recognize employers' associations and labour unions for the first time in the history of Ethiopia on 5 September 1962. Once the right to form labour unions was legally recognized, a number of workers in several industrial plants began to establish their own local unions.

Thus, the years from 1962 to 1974 can be taken as the formative years in the history of the Ethiopian labour movement. It was the period in which labour relations in Ethiopia was legally instituted. This in turn resulted in the birth of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Union (CELU) on 9 April 1963 and the Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF) on 11 April 1964. Accordingly, Ethiopia was able to send a full tripartite delegation to the 47th International Labour Organization's annual conference held in Geneva in June 1963. It was also the period during which CELU strengthened its foreign relations with the support of the state. On the other hand, the formative period of the Ethiopian labour movement was also characterized by the struggle between CELU, which was determined to be a vibrant and independent confederation, on the one hand and the state, which feared the growth of strong labour unions as a threat to its political power on the other.

The antagonistic relation between CELU and the state reached its climax at the end of July 1963 when Abreham Mäkonän, the first president of CELU sent an ultimatum of general strike to the MNCD. The attempted general strike, however, ended with the forceful resignation of the president. After his resignation, CELU was made to be very subordinate to the state under the leadership of the former General Secretary, Beyene Solomon and labour bureaucrats. The coming to power of labour bureaucrats who had no unions of their own created internal division among the leadership of CELU. The internal power struggle among the leaders of CELU continued unabated until the outbreak of the 1974 revolution.

In general, the strong subordination of CELU to the state and the enduring internal power struggle among its leaders contributed a lot to the failure of the Ethiopian labour movement to establish an independent national confederation and to be an agent for the 1974 Ethiopian revolution.

CHAPTER THREE

CONFEDERATION OF ETHIOPIAN LABOUR UNIONS (CELU) AND THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION, 1974-77

The year 1974 witnessed deep and occasionally violent political and social changes in the history of Ethiopia as a result of the collapse of the age old monarchy.¹ It marked a decisive turning point in Ethiopian modern history though popular democratic opposition against the monarchy had already been started since the 1960s.² Even though most accounts of the Ethiopian revolution take the mutiny of the noncommissioned officers of the 24th brigade of the 4th division stationed at Nägälè Boräna on 12 January 1974 as the start of the revolutionary events, it was in mid February of the same year that the popular masses, including workers, students, teachers, religious fathers and urban dwellers began to be involved in the revolution and assaulted the staggering monarchy.³

Historical accounts so far produced on the 1974 Ethiopian revolution emphasized only the role of junior military officers and students, and downplayed the role of urban dwellers in general and workers in particular. This paradigmatic fixation on students and junior military officers was

¹Marina Ottaway, "Social Classes and Corporate Interests in Ethiopian Revolution," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1976, p. 469; Colin Legum, *Ethiopia: The Fall of Emperor Haile Selassie I's Empire* (London: Africa Contemporary Record Ltd, 1975), p. 30; Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution* (London: Review of African Political Economy, 1975), p. 104.

²Addis, p. 103.

³Heinz Käufeler, *Modernization, Legitimacy and Social Movement: A Study of Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Revolution in Iran and Ethiopia* (Zurich: University of Zurich, 1988), p. 112; Rene Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution*, Translated by A.M Berrett, (London: Zed Press, 1983), p. 159; John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, (Addis Ababa: Shama PLC, 1978), p. 93; Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 38; Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution*, (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1978), p. 1.

apparently created because of the radical ideas raised by the students and the culmination of the revolution under the leadership of the military. Though it has been downplayed, the working class movement was one of the popular movements that paralyzed the imperial regime and tightened the tempo of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution by carrying out a series of strikes in several industrial plants. True, the revolution was accelerated when Ethiopian workers began to express their strong resentment against their employers and the government. This came about when militant white collar workers who lost their trust on the government because of its false promises began to pressurize the leaders of CELU to call a general strike. Even though the leaders of CELU had presented the workers' grievances to the Ministry of National Community Development (MNCD) and the emperor since July 1963, they could not get appropriate response. The promise of the emperor to modify the first labour law was also very sluggish and created resentment among the workers. Further, the leaders of CELU who demanded change were intimidated and harassed by the state. Due to persistent intimidation and pressure, for instance, Abreham Mäkonän, the president of CELU, was finally forced to resign in August 1963.⁴

Following the resignation of Abreham, the state began to control the activities of CELU more strictly. On the other hand, the leadership of CELU passed on from militant trade unionists to uneducated rank and file trade unionists and labour bureaucrats who represented no trade unions. The labour bureaucrats [university graduates] who came to support trade union leaders and eventually climbed to the leadership position did not feel the pain of the workers as much as trade unionists. In addition, they often avoided confrontation with the state and remained very

⁴CETU, Box No. 42 , File No.1, A letter written from the General Council of CELU to the Labour Relations Department in the MNCD in *Nähäse*, 30, 1955 EC (3 September 1963).

subordinate to it. Moreover, CELU was also entangled in internal power struggle from 1965 to 1973. This power struggle forced the leaders of CELU to strengthen their relationship with the government to the point of being subordinate to it. Consequently, the various demands of the Ethiopian workers were suppressed until the outbreak of the revolution. It was under such circumstances that the militant white collar workers joined the revolution by carrying out successive strikes in several industrial plants.⁵

Even though the leaders of CELU were not ready to break their subordination to the state, the militant white collar workers pressurized it to call for a general strike that would totally paralyze the regime. The militant white collar workers had already started struggling against the employers and the government prior to the outbreak of the revolution. Their educational and social relations with the student movement reinforced the struggle of the white collar workers against the state during the revolution.⁶ The revolution was, thus, used as an opportunity by the workers to put pressure on the state and get their demands appropriately heard and thereby enhance their bargaining position vis-à-vis the employers and the state. As it was one of the legally organized sections of the society in the country, workers played an important role in keeping the momentum of the revolution together with students until it was hijacked by the military. Even after the military takeover, CELU served as a battleground between the civilian leftist groups and the military. Since both the military and the civilian leftist groups aspired to establish a socialist state, they focused their attention on the working class of the country. The infiltration of these opposing factions into CELU created deep cracks among workers which in turn resulted in its demise and the birth of an underground rival trade union, the Ethiopian

⁵Thomas C. Killian, "Workers, Capital and the State in the Ethiopian Region, 1919-1974," PhD Dissertation, University of Stanford: Department of History, 1985, p. 493.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 494-495.

Workers Revolutionary Union (EWRU), which was subsequently superseded by state-sponsored All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU).

Despite the active involvement of the militant white collar workers in several labour protests and strikes that enhanced the tempo of the revolution and in spite of the fact that workers were the only legally organized sections of the society, they were not able to get any benefits from the revolution. The small number of workers in general and enlightened workers in particular, the enduring subordination of CELU's leadership to the government, the organizational problems of the confederation, and the infiltration by several leftist groups were the major factors that inhibited CELU from exerting a serious challenge and bringing about change in the status quo of the labour relations during the revolution and thereafter.⁷ Be that as it may, the question of who led the 1974 revolution (the workers or the petty bourgeois) became a central question among the two leftist groups, EPRP and AESM. It was not also given conclusive answer by scholars who wrote on the revolution. Some other scholars even argued that neither the petty bourgeoisie nor the working class led the revolution. They further argued that the revolution was a spontaneous movement until it was hijacked by the military.⁸

This chapter, therefore, tries to investigate: How did students and workers influence one another during the revolution? What effect did the first general strike bring on the revolution? How did the military and the civilian leftist groups influence workers and their organization during the revolution? How did the Ethiopian Workers Revolutionary Union (EWRU) emerge? and What

⁷Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 149.

⁸Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian People's Party, Part I from the Early Beginnings to 1975* (Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, Inc, 1993), p. 114.

role did the workers in general play during the revolution? These are some of the major questions that this chapter tries to investigate.

3.1 CELU and the Student Movement

In order to understand the role of CELU in the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, it is imperative to delve primarily into the relationship between the labour and the student movements. True, in Ethiopia, the labour movement preceded the student movement. The labour movement began in the 1940s, a decade before the student movement.⁹ The latter was born in the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) around the end of the 1950s. The students of the UCAA started their movement by raising critical comments on the activities of the student council. They criticized the student council as subordinate to the Dean and demanded to be an autonomous organization. They also opposed the authority of the UCAA administration.¹⁰ Nevertheless, while the student movement strengthened itself and began to influence the society beyond the campus and outside its class since the 1960s, the labour movement had remained corporatist and failed to voice the demands of the various other sections of the society until the 1974 revolution. The absence of enlightened leadership was one of the constraints of the confederation that confined it to defending only its corporate interests.¹¹ Though the labour movement managed to form its national confederation at the same time as the student movement began to shift its focus from poetry contests to the pressing issues of the society and entered into the process of radicalization, it chose to focus on its internal problems than to go hand in hand with the student movement.

⁹Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär,"Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 31.

¹⁰Randi Rønning Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977* (East Lansing MI, 1985), p. 83.

¹¹Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1991: From a Monarchial Autocracy to a Military Oligarchy* (London; New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997), p. 64.

The radicalization of workers came to the fore in early 1974, about a decade later than that of the students. This was apparently because of the shift of leadership from militant trade unionists to subservient labour bureaucrats who chose to subordinate the organization to the state.

The first contact between workers and students began when ICFTU, in cooperation with MNCD and HSIU, organized a seminar for workers at Haile Selassie I University from 4 to 16 March 1963. The seminar aimed at encouraging workers to form unions that could transcend the prevalent self-help mode. It was at this conference that two students, Gäbrä Selaṣē Gäbrä Mariam and Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaël, came from the Department of Public Administration of HSIU and worked as interpreters for the representatives of ICFTU.¹² The coming of these students marked the beginning of the relationship between workers and students. After the end of the conference, students continued to assist the leaders of CELU in organizing and coordinating their activities. Regarding the support of the students, Patrick Gilkes also noted that the students helped CELU in its administration and in preparing the *Voice of Labour*.¹³ He added that "...it was largely their influence that encouraged the movement to operate literacy campaigns, organize thrift and credit cooperatives and hold seminars for them around the counter."¹⁴ Moreover, they brought two graduates, Täsfa Gäbrä Mariam and Fesseha Şeyon Tākē from the Department of Public Administration and Business Administration, respectively, in September 1964. Nevertheless, since the newcomers were immediately elected as Secretary General and Assistant Secretary in 1965, they were apparently satisfied with the posts and did nothing to influence labour politically. Regardless of their active participation in the student movement, they did not make any visible attempt to radicalize the Ethiopian workers. Besides being HSIU

¹²Addis Zāmān, *Yäkatit* 26, 1955EC or 5 March 1963.

¹³Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia* (London: Julian Friedmann Publishers LTD, 1975), 167.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

students in the heyday of the student movement, some of them even participated in the leadership of the movement. Gäbrä Selasè Gäbrä Mariam, for instance, served as president of the student union of the College of Public Administration in 1962/63 and treasurer and secretary of the National Union of Ethiopian University Students (NUEUS) in 1963/1964.¹⁵

Nevertheless, apart from providing technical skills, the students did not do that much to radicalize the labour movement and transform it into a political force. They were apparently silenced by the benefit and position they were provided by the confederation. Regarding the role of these students inside CELU, Randi Balsvik also noted that "...they provided necessary technical skill but little in the way of turning the labour movement into a political force."¹⁶

Though the students argued that they demanded for socio-economic and political reforms for all Ethiopians, they did not give due attention to the demands of the workers until the 1974 revolution. One can even argue that the student movement focused more on addressing the problems of peasants than other sections of the society. They demonstrated against the backward land tenure system of the country which they believed as the main cause for the impoverishment of peasants. This was clearly manifested in the slogans that students carried in various demonstrations. For instance, the 1965 slogan, 'Land to the Tiller' and the 1966 slogan, 'Is Poverty a Crime?' mainly reflected only the appalling life conditions of peasants and the urban poor. The 1967 protest in defense of civil liberties and the 1969 demonstration motto, 'Education for All' also focused on the demands high school students, teachers and the general public. The

¹⁵Informant: Gäbrä Selasè Gäbrä Mariam; CETU, Box, No. 42, File No. 2. It contains the profile of Gäbrä Selasè Gäbrä Mariam.

¹⁶Randi Rønning Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students...*, p. 81.

1969 demonstration was mainly inspired by the high school students.¹⁷ In 1971 and 1972, secondary school students joined the university students to demonstrate against the rise in bus fares and food prices, the arrest and detention of the destitute, and in favor of land reform.¹⁸ In 1973, students' demonstration was against the inadequate response of the government to one of the century's worst famines. They protested that the famine victims were not given appropriate assistance.¹⁹

But, this does not mean that there was no attempt to establish solidarity between workers and students at all before 1974. There were times when students attempted to strengthen their solidarity with the rest of the Ethiopian people including workers. In a letter written to all concerned bodies, including CELU, on 11 April 1967, students announced that more than three hundred students were arrested on 10 April 1967 while demonstrating against the ratification of the peaceful public demonstration proclamation by the imperial government. In the letter, they called upon all the Ethiopian people, including workers, to join the struggle.²⁰ Moreover, during the demonstration that they conducted on 15 October 1970 near the Ministry of Finance, the students expressed their solidarity with the peasants and the workers in the following stanza.

በለው በለው አትለውም ወይ
 ጨቋኙ ሲገዛህ ዝም ትላለህ ወይ
 የገበሬዎች አለኝታ የወዛደሩ ተገን
 ፋኖ ፋኖ ግባ ደን
 ጨቋኙን እያደንክ ለማውረድ ከደይን²¹

¹⁷Bahru Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement ca. 1960-1974* (New York: James Currey; Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2014), p.153.

¹⁸Randi Rønning Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students...*, p. 297; Alem Asres, "History of the Ethiopian Student Movement (in Ethiopia and North America): Its Impact on Internal Social Change, 1960-1974," PhD Dissertation, University of Maryland: Department of Education, 1990), p. 86.

¹⁹Randi Rønning Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students...*, p. 303; Alem, p. 87.

²⁰Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Clandestine Literature (IES/CL) 2395/05/03. A letter sent from Addis Ababa University College Students to all concerned bodies in *Miyazeya* 3, 1959EC (11 April 1967).

²¹IES/ CL, 2395/05/08, It deals about placards used by students during the demonstration that was conducted on *Teqemet* 5, 1963EC (15 October 1970).

What are you waiting for? Strike him! Strike him!
Why do you keep silent when ruled by a tyrant?
The guardian of peasants and the protector of workers,
Freedom fighter, freedom fighter, goes into the forest,
To drive down the tyrant into hell.

Above all, the death of Tselahun Gezaw on 28 December 1969 made the students very desperate and suspicious and pushed them to establish alliance with the rest of the Ethiopian people, particularly, the workers. This was clearly described in the subsequent announcement of USUAA. It noted that the students should no longer struggle alone; rather, they should work hand in hand with the workers. Regarding the importance of solidarity between students and workers, USUAA further asserted that:

...ጨቋኙና በዝባዝ መንግስት በተማሪዎች ላይ የጦርነት አዋጅ ስለ ለፈፈ በጦርነት ላይ መሆንህን ሳትዘነጋ ያንተ ለብቻ በያለህበት ሰላማዊ ሰልፍ ማድረግ መልሶ ጠላትህ ስለሚወጋህ በተማሪ አንድነት የሚወለደውን አንቅስቃሴ ለጥቂት ጊዜ በትግስት ጠብቅ።...የታሰረው እየታሰረ የሞተው እየሞተ ሲሞት ሲተካ ግዳጃቸውን ፈፅመው ባለፉት አግር እየተተካን የወደቁትን መሳሪያ እየተቀበልን ድልን እስከተቀዳጃን ድረስ ከወዛደሩ ጎን ለጎን ተሰልፈን ደማችንን ለማፍሰስ ቆርጠናል።... የተማሪዎችና የላብአደሩ ደሀ ህዝብ አንድነት ለዘላለም ይኑር ! ጨቋኙና በዝባዝ መንግስት ይውደቅ!²²

...Since the repressive and exploitive government has declared war on students, you should not forget that you are at war. Staging demonstrations separately will expose you easily to be attacked easily by the enemy. Thus, you should wait patiently for some time until a new organization is born from the student movement. ...No matter how many are jailed and no matter how many are dead, we shall step into the shoes of those who passed away, carrying out their obligation and taking over the weapons of those who have fallen, we are determined to shed our blood along with the workers until we get victory. Long live the unity of poor students and workers! Down with the repressive and exploitative government!

In addition, in its general assembly held on 23 May 1971, USUAA passed a decision concerning the demands of workers and expressed its unfailing solidarity. It stated that "...በአዲስ አበባ ውስጥ የኑሮ

²²IES/CL 2395/04/10. Students announcement following the death of their leader on 28 December 1969.

ውድነት በጥፍ ስለጨመረ የሰራተኛው ደመወዝ በተመጣጣኝ ደረጃ እንዲጨምር እንጠይቃለን። ሰራተኛው መብቱን ለማስከበር ከአሰሪዎች ጋር ትግል ባደረገበት ቁጥር መንግስት አሰሪዎችን በመደገፍ የወሰደውን እርምጃ በጥብቅ እናወግዛለን።"²³

Similarly, the confederation also expressed its solidarity with the students whenever they faced problems in their struggle against the government. CELU began to show such solidarity on 10 April 1967 when students went on strike against the ratification of the Peaceful Public Demonstration Proclamation which was promulgated as Proclamation No. 243/1967 on 11 February 1967. The demonstration was repressed by security personnel and a number of students were thrown into jail.²⁴ The next day, students wrote a letter to CELU requesting for solidarity. In response to their request, CELU wrote a letter to Prime Minister Aklilu Häbtäwold on 13 April 1967. The letter reads:

... የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች አንድነት ማህበር ጠቅላይ ምክርቤት ሚያዝያ 4 ቀን 1959 ዓ.ም በዋናው ፅፈት ቤት ልዩ አስቸኳይ ስብሰባ አድርጎ በነጋሪት ጋዜጣ 21ኛ ዓመት ቁጥር 6 ስለ የሕዝብ ሰላማዊ ሰልፍ ስብሰባ የወጣውን አዋጅ ቁጥር 243/1959 ተመልክቶ ከመጽናቱ በፊት የዩንቨርሲቲ ተማሪዎች በኢትዮጵያ ህገ መንግስት አንቀጽ 45 በተሰጠው መብት ሰላማዊ ሰልፍ አድርገው በዚሁ አንቀጽ ትርጉም ረገድ ከ ኢትዮጵያ ንጉሰነገስት መንግስት ህግ አስከባሪዎች ጋር ሳይግባቡ መቅረታቸውን ተገንዝቦ ይህም ብዙ ጉዳት እንዳመጣ በማየት እና አለመግባባቱ በሰላም እንዳያልቅ ያደረገውን ወገን እየነቀፈ የተፈጠረውን አለመግባባት በአጭር ጊዜ ውስጥ በሰላም ፍፃሜ አግኝቶ የቆሰሉት ትክክለኛ ህክምና እንዲያገኙ የታሰሩት በፍጥነት እንዲፈቱ የተዘጉት ትምህርት ቤቶች በአስቸኳይ እንዲከፈቱ በማክበር እየጠየቅን በህጉ በኩል ያለውን አስተያየት በቅርብ በፅሁፍ የምናቀርብ መሆኑን እንገልጻለን።²⁵

...The General Council of CELU held a unique and an urgent meeting in its headquarters on 12 April 1967 and looked thoroughly into the Peaceful Public Demonstration Proclamation No. 243/1967 published on *Nägarit Gazetä* Vol. 21, No. 6. The council realized that a disagreement was created between the students and the security personnel when the former demonstrated against the proclamation before its ratification using their right as per Article 45 of the constitution. Having understood the huge damage brought by the disagreement, the council rebukes the party that hindered the peaceful resolution and we humbly

²³"...Since inflation has doubled in Addis Ababa, we demand a commensurate pay rise for workers. We also condemn the measure taken by the government in favor of the employers whenever the workers struggle to defend their rights."; IES/ CL, 2395/05/17. A resolution of USUAA passed on 23 May 1971.

²⁴Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students...*, p. 185.

²⁵CETU, Box No. 48, File No. 01 A letter sent from CELU to Prime Minister, Aklilu Häbtäwold, *Miyazeya* 5, 1959 EC (13 April 1967).

request both parties to resolve the problem peacefully in a short period of time, and to treat wounded students, set free imprisoned students and open closed schools urgently. Regarding the proclamation, the council will disclose its opinion in written form within a short period of time.

Nearly four years later, CELU also wrote the following letter to Prime Minister Aklilu

Habtäwold on 31 May 1971 demanding the opening of schools. It reads as:

...የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች አንድነት ማህበር የሰው ጉልበት ነክ ድርጅት ከመሆኑም በላይ የድርጅቱ አባሎች ሃላፊነት ያላቸው ኢትዮጵያዊ ግብር ከፋዮች እና ወላጆች እንደመሆናቸው በየጊዜው ስለሚፈጠሩ ብሄራዊ ችግሮች አስተያየት መስጠት ግዴታቸው ነው። ጥፋተኞቹ ተማሪዎቹም ሆኑ የትምህርት መሪዎች ከ አንድ ሺህ በላይ የሚሆኑ የዩኒቨርሲቲ ተማሪዎችና በብዙ ሺህ የሚቆጠሩ የሁለተኛ ደረጃ ተማሪዎች የ አንድ አመት ትምህርት ጊዜ ማጥፋት ከአገሩ ጠቅላላ የልማት ፕላን ጋር የተሳሰረ ችግር በመሆኑ ከፍተኛ ግምት ተሰጥቶ የሚወሰን እንደ በአካዳሚ ዓለም በፋካሊቲ ካውንስል ደረጃ በቀላሉ የሚወሰን ነገር መሆን አይገባውም። የተማሪዎች ከትምህርት ገቢታ ማቋረጥ የሀገሪቱን የሰው ሃይል ፍላጎት የሚያደናቅፍ ከመሆኑም በላይ የሥራ ችግር ባለበት በአሁኑ ሁኔታ ኢኮኖሚው ያልጠበቃቸው ሰዎች ወደ ገበያ ማቅረብ በችግር ላይ ችግርን መፍጠር ነው። ስለዚህም ትምህርት የማይፈልጉትን ተማሪዎች በግድ ማስተማር ባይችሉም ትምህርት ለሚፈልጉ ሁሉ ግን ያለምንም ግዳጅ የትምህርት ገቢቶች እንዲከፈላቸው በማክበር እያሳሰብን ይህ እንዲሆን ግን ድርጅታችን አስፈላጊውን መተባበር ለመስጠት የተዘጋጀ መሆኑን በትህትና እንገልጻለን።²⁶

...CELU is an organization that works on issues related to human labour. Besides, since its members are family leaders, responsible citizens and tax payers, it is their obligation to provide suggestion on the recurrent national problems. Whether students or school administrators created the problem, when more than a thousand of university students and many thousands of high school students drop their education for a year, it hinders the general national development plan. Thus, this problem is not something to be given less attention and to be easily decided by academicians at a faculty council level, but it is a high priority issue which needs higher level decisions. Besides affecting the country's demand for skilled manpower, students' dropout from school would result in the coming of inefficient professionals to the market and this worsens the problem when unemployment is still a big challenge. Hence, we kindly urge you to open the schools to all interested students without any forceful action though it was difficult for you to teach uninterested students forcefully. We would also humbly notify that our organization will extend all the necessary support to make this happen.

²⁶CETU, Box No. 48, File No. 01, A letter sent from CELU's 1st Assistant Secretary General, Täsa Gäbrä Mariam to Prime Minister Aklilu Habtäwold, *Genbot* 23, 1963EC (31 May 1971).

The 1974 revolution further strengthened the solidarity between workers and students in their struggle against the imperial government. The adoption of most of the slogans of USUAA by CELU and its affiliates indicated that they had been struggling hand in hand against the imperial regime. On some occasions, they even demonstrated against the same grievance at the same time. On some instances, the workers' demonstration was immediately followed by that of the students. In early 1974, USUAA's communication department briefly underlined the importance of consolidating solidarity with peasants, workers, high school students and the whole Ethiopian people to overthrow the imperial regime. It noted that:

... በልዩልዩ መንገድ የምንወስዳቸውን እርምጃዎች እስክንገልፅላችሁ ድረስ በየቦታው በተቻለው መንገድ ሁሉ ትግላችሁን ቀጥሉ፤ በመታሰር አንጻራችንም ብንጻራችንም እዚህ ላይረሰን ለገበሬውና ለወዝኦደሩ የኢትዮጵያ ህዝብ ብንጻራችን የሚበዛብን አይሆንም። በዚህ የፈተና ሰዓት በዚህ የትግል ጊዜያት በኢትዮጵያ የሚገኙ የአንደኛና የሁለተኛ ደረጃ ተማሪዎች በሙሉ እንዲሁም ጠቅላላው የኢትዮጵያ ህዝብ ኅይሉን በማስተባበር ከኛ ጋር በአንድ መንፈስ እንደሚታገል ሙሉ እምነት አለን።²⁷

...Continue your struggle in every place by every possible means, until we notify you the measures which we intend to take through various means. We do not dissolve for being jailed; if we do, that is not too much as we do it for the Ethiopian peasants and workers who brought us up to this level. We believe that in this turbulent period of struggle, all primary and high school students and the whole Ethiopians will coordinate their forces and struggle with us in one spirit.

A joint demonstration between workers and students was conducted for the first time on 18 February 1974. The strike was started by taxi drivers and transport workers against a 50% increase in the price of fuel which was mainly caused by the global oil crisis. The strikers were soon joined by thousands of students and the urban unemployed who began to attack the properties of the ruling class. On the same day, teachers also struck against the unpopular education program called the "Sector Review" adopted by the government in December 1973. These joint strikes pressurized Prime Minister Aklilu Häbtäwold and his cabinet to resign on 27

²⁷IES/CL, 2395/05/35, An announcement made by the Communication Department of USUAA around early 1974.

February 1974.²⁸ Even though the leaders of CELU opposed the 50 percent increment and the sector review, they did not call for a general strike or were not ready to lead the strike of transport workers, teachers, students and taxi drivers. The leaders of CELU were reluctant to organize and lead demonstrations apparently because they were still subordinate to the state. They also apparently believed that the imperial regime could not be overthrown by any kind of mass demonstration or revolution.

Even though Endalkačāw Mäkonän was appointed as prime minister on 28 February 1974, he immediately faced stiff resistance from the students, teachers and workers.²⁹ CELU held its General Council meeting from 23-29 February 1974 and sent a 17 point demand to the government. In its final demand, CELU stressed that it would call a general strike for about four days if the government failed to respond to all of its demands. Nevertheless, the prime minister downplayed CELU's ultimatum and tried to appease its leadership at the final hours. Consequently, CELU called a general strike from March 7 to 10.³⁰ The workers did not go out to the street; rather they stopped work and spent the four days in their house. Some workers, however, expressed their grievances in industrial plants and at the CELU headquarters. As they had done during the strike of transport workers and taxi drivers, the students did not go out for demonstration during the March 1974 general strike.³¹ Since workers did not take to the streets as the transport workers and taxi drivers had done a week before, the students had apparently no room to go out and participate in the general strike. Be that as it may, USUAA expressed its solidarity with CELU by disseminating different anti government and pro-CELU leaflets.

²⁸Killion, p. 548; Andargachew Tiruneh, pp. 38-39.

²⁹Killion, p. 549.

³⁰Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel I*, 1976 EC, p. 96; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 1, *Mägabit* 1966EC.

³¹Killion, p. 550.

The solidarity between workers and students continued even after the deposition of the emperor on 12 September 1974. In its General Assembly meeting held on 18 September 1974, for instance, USUAA resolved to strengthen its solidarity with the progressive groups including CELU. It noted that: "...ትግላችንንም ከተራማጅ ድርጅቶች እና ግለሰቦች ጋር እንቀጥላለን። በተለይም ከኢ.ሰ.አ.ማ ጋር ያለንን ፅኑና የማያወላውል አንድነታችንን በድጋሜ እንገልጻለን። በወቅቱ ያለው የጋራ ታሪካዊ ተልኳችን አስተባብሮናል።"³² They supported the resolution of the workers passed in their General Council meeting held from September 15-17, 1974. It mainly demanded the removal of the military regime and the establishment of a people's government which was initiated by the students.³³

In general, the concerted effort of the civilian left on the one hand and the military on the other pushed the revolution to its peak and brought Emperor Haile Selassie I's power to an end on 12 September 1974. The civilian left comprised, among others, radical students, teachers, workers, civil servants, urban petty bourgeois and unemployed youth. Among the civilian left, the students and the workers exerted the most audacious and sustaining challenges against the imperial regime.³⁴ Therefore, one can argue that it was the solidarity created between the two parties that kept the momentum of the revolution from February to the end of June. But, from the end of June onwards, the military dominated the scene and appropriated the revolution.

³²"...We will continue our struggle with progressive individuals and organizations. We restate our unwavering and obstinate unity, particularly with CELU. Our existing common historical mission made us to cooperate one another. See also IES/CL, 2395/05/46, It deals about the resolution of USUAA passed on *Mäskäräm* 8, 1967 EC (18 September 1974).

³³Markakis and Nega, p. 141.

³⁴Legum, p. 32; Lefort, p. 55.

3.2. The First General Strike and the Radicalization of CELU

Following the failure of the attempted general strike in July 1963, CELU had been calling for the amendment of the labour relations proclamation, particularly provisions related to treatment of workers by employers, wages, working conditions, and freedom of association in government organizations. Though very sporadic and uncoordinated, local unions in different plants continued protesting against the government and the employers. Their protest was, however, purely apolitical for a long time and focused on demanding only the improvement of workers' corporate interests. Nevertheless, most of the protests undertaken by these unions were repressed by the security personnel of the regime. Despite this successive repression, however, local unions continued to express their resentment by presenting their petition to the emperor.³⁵

Pressurized by the local unions, the leaders of CELU also presented the grievances of workers to the MNCD at different times before the outbreak of the revolution. Nevertheless, since they were subservient to the state and did it half-heartedly, the actions of the leaders of CELU could not bring the desired changes. They did it merely to cool down the grievances of workers. On 10 March 1966, for instance, the leaders of CELU submitted a nine page proposal to the MNCD demanding the amendment of some of the articles of the labour relations proclamation 210/1963. Among others, articles related to the right to strike, freedom of association, health insurance, pension, collective bargaining, warning and termination, severance pay, and minimum wage were included in the amendment proposal. But, the MNCD failed to respond to any of the

³⁵Lefort, pp. 26-27.

proposed amendments.³⁶ Consequently, the General Council of CELU met from 6 to 9 April 1968 and again proposed basic modifications on some of the articles of the Civil Code and Proclamation No. 210/1963 that needed urgent amendment. But, this attempt also ended without any result since the government did not take any action to improve the labour relations proclamation or other labour related provisions of the Civil Code.³⁷ Regardless of the imperial government's indifferent attitude towards their demands, however, workers and local unions' leaders continued to pressurize both the leaders of CELU and the imperial government. As a result of the continuous agitation of workers, therefore, the leaders of CELU decided to call a meeting of the General Council from 22 to 24 November 1969 to discuss the possible action to be taken against the government. Even though the General Council agreed to make a one day general strike on 7 January 1969 (Ethiopian Christmas Day), it failed to materialize as it was done merely to cool down the disgruntled workers.³⁸ One can argue that, besides imperial government interference, CELU's repeated failure to conduct a general strike was apparently attributed to its very weak, subservient and divided leadership.

Despite the stubborn attitude of the imperial government to the demands of workers and the failure of the subservient leaders of CELU to pressurize the government, the workers continued to express their grievances since the first attempted general strike. It was when workers were in such a state of mind that the revolution broke out in February 1974.³⁹ As a result, the revolution was seen as a splendid opportunity by the workers to pressurize the government. Thus, haunted

³⁶*Voice of Labour*, A Special Brochure Prepared on the Occasion of the 5th CELU Annual Conference and Anniversary, *Mägabit* 28, 1960 (6 April 1968), pp. 6-8; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel I*, 1976 EC, p. 73.

³⁷Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel I*, 1976 EC, p.73.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁹Käufeler, p. 112; Lefort, p. 159; Markakis and Nega, p. 93; Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 38; Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire...*, p. 1.

by the persistent grievances of workers and emboldened by the national situation, the leaders of CELU called a meeting of the General Council from February 23 to March 1, 1974 and adopted a seventeen point resolution by incorporating the various demands of workers and the society at large.⁴⁰ Thus, one can argue that the outbreak of the revolution contributed a lot to pushing CELU to call a general strike for the first time in its history. The outbreak of the 1974 revolution brought the Ethiopian workers out of their situation of extreme torpor and encouraged them to undertake a general strike that further accelerated the course of the revolution. On the other hand, this also marked the beginning of the radicalization of the Ethiopian workers.

The workers had begun to participate in the popular movement sporadically before the general strike. On 18 February 1974, for instance, the teachers went on strike seeking a higher wage and protesting the educational reform "Sector Review". It was on the same day that the taxi drivers also struck against a 50 percent increase on petrol price. The teachers and taxi drivers were also supported by students, the unemployed youth, workers in the transport sectors and some sections of the urban population who took control of Addis Ababa's street voicing their demands and reflecting their accumulated grievances against the government. This brought the traffic of the city to a standstill. Factories, shops and public service providers were also closed. In fact, the main factor which pushed the urban population to support the taxi drivers was the economic crisis of the country in general and the inflation problem in particular.⁴¹ This widespread demonstration paralyzed the economic and administrative structure of the capital and some major provincial towns. This popular uprising was also a serious challenge to the police force in the city. Moreover, the security of the country was precarious because of the mutiny of the army for

⁴⁰IES/CL, 2390 /1/05, A letter sent from CELU to MNCD, Prime Minister *Lej* Endalkačäw, its Affiliates and International Labour Organizations *Yekatit* 22,1966 EC (1 March 1974).

⁴¹Markakis and Nega, p. 100; Addis, p.105; Käufeler, p. 113; Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire...*, p. 3.

pay increment since January of the same year. Consequently, the emperor, in a televised speech on 23 February 1974, announced that his imperial government had reduced the petrol price increase from 50 percent to 25 percent.⁴²

The taxi drivers' and transport workers' strike, undoubtedly, played a significant role in forcing the government to change its reaction to the public discontent, probably for the first time in the country's history. The strike can also be taken as one of the major factors that forced Prime Minister Aklilu Häbtawold and his cabinet to resign on 27 February 1974. Even though CELU did not play a significant role in coordinating the taxi drivers during the strike, it denounced the subsequent police repressions and the undemocratic responses of the government to the demonstrators.⁴³ More importantly, the February popular upsurge not only demonstrated the incapability of the ruling class to continue ruling in the old way but also formed a real landmark in the subsequent development of popular movements in the country.⁴⁴

Even though CELU had no significant role as an organization in the social unrest that had been paralyzing the country in February because of continuous intimidation by the government, it had been planning to undertake a general strike in the beginning of March 1974. The General Council of CELU met from February 23 to March 1 and discussed the situation of the country in general and the government's indifferent attitude towards the demands of workers in particular. At the end of the meeting, the General Council issued a resolution which comprised a list of seventeen demands. Seventeen executive members of the general council, led by the deputy president, Alām Abdi, signed the resolution on the first day of March and presented it to the

⁴²Lefort, p. 53; Kāufeler, p. 113; Melaku Abate, "A History of the Role of Teachers in the Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-77," MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 2006, p. 35.

⁴³Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁴Addis, p. 98.

MNCD and the Prime Minister, *Lej Endalkačäw Mäkonän* who had been appointed on 28 February 1974 following the resignation of the former Prime Minister, Aklilu Häbtäwold. At the end of the resolution, CELU threatened the government with a general strike if its demands would not be appropriately addressed.⁴⁵

On the other hand, while the General Council met and passed the resolution, the president of CELU, Beyene Solomon, was in Europe to attend the World Peace Council and the ILO Governing Body meetings, which were held in Moscow and Geneva respectively.⁴⁶ Interestingly enough, Fesseha Teyon Täkè, the Secretary General of CELU, who participated in the General Council meeting, opposed the incorporation of minimum wage and freedom of speech in the resolution. He also reported his reservations on some points of the resolution to the president.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, emboldened by the army, students and teachers who mutinied and struck in January and February, the General Council disregarded the concern of the President and Secretary General of CELU and passed the resolution hoping to solve not only the protracted problems of workers but also the problems of society at large. The disagreement between members of the General Council and the leaders of CELU on some of the resolution reflected that there was a clear division between the radical opposition composed of politically motivated white collar workers and the subservient leaders of the confederation who wanted to remain in power at the expense of the toiling workers. The debate held during the General Council's meeting from February 23 to March 1, 1974 indicated that the leadership was still subservient to the state. While the members of the General Council tried to incorporate the demands of the

⁴⁵Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Mägeläçawoç," *Yäkatit* 12, 1966 E.C, pp. 1-6; IES/CL, 2390/01/05; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel I*, 1976 EC (1984), pp. 98-104; Ethiopian Herald, 7 March 1974 (*Yäkatit* 28, 1966 EC)

⁴⁶Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy...*, pp. 122-123.

⁴⁷Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel I*, 1976 EC (1984), p. 80; Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy...*, pp. 122-123.

society, the leadership of CELU continued to raise demands very similar to those raised during the previously attempted general strike of 1963 and 1969.⁴⁸

Regardless of the reservations of the leadership towards some of the demands, however, the General Council passed the resolution and submitted it with a cover letter to the new prime minister on 1 March 1974. It was the day after his accession to power that he was confronted with this general strike ultimatum.⁴⁹ Copies of the same letter were also sent to the MNCD and all local unions and to concerned national and international organizations. In the cover letter, the General Council of CELU stressed that the persistent indifferent attitude of the imperial government to the demands of workers pushed it to pass such a momentous decision. It noted that:

...የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች አንድነት ማህበር የሰራተኞች መብትና ጥቅም እንዲጠበቅ በማለት በየጊዜው የተጠየቁት የሰራተኛ ጉዳዮች ምንም ዓይነት ውጤት ባለማግኘታቸው ለመጨረሻ ጊዜ የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች አንድነት ማህበር ጠቅላይ ምክር ቤት ተሰብስቦ የሰጠውን ውሳኔ ሰራተኞች በሙሉ ሥራ ላይ እንዲያውሉት ለማህበሮችና ሠራተኞች በሙሉ እንዲተላለፍ ስለወሰነ፤ የጠቅላይ ምክር ቤቱን ውሳኔ ከዚህ ጋር አባሪ በማድረግ የላከን መሆኑን አስታውቃለሁ።⁵⁰

...Since all the demands that CELU had been requesting to safeguard the rights and benefits of workers did not get any result, the General Council of CELU met lately for the last time and passed a decision. As the Council also agreed to convey its decision to all workers and their unions to work accordingly, I notify that we sent the decision of the council enclosed with this cover letter.

The council also hoped that the general strike would ultimately improve the socio-economic conditions of the workers and enhance their bargaining power.

⁴⁸Killion, p. 551.

⁴⁹*Addis Zāmān, Yākatit* 28, 1966EC (7 March 1974).

⁵⁰IES/CL, 2390/01/5, A letter sent from CELU to MNCD, Prime Minister *Lej* Endalkačāw, its affiliates and International Labour Organizations on 22 February 1966 EC (1 March 1974).

The list of seventeen demands included minimum wage, starting salary, salary adjustments, exemption from income tax on labour pension's fund, pension schemes, modification of provisions governing dismissals without adequate reasons or justifications, formations of new unions, strikes, labour publications, free education, price control, temporary employment, job opportunities and priorities. Indeed, the list of demands can be roughly grouped into three categories. The first category purely constituted workers' corporate interests. It comprised of demands such as modification of Proclamation No. 210/1963, introduction of the right to strike, introduction of minimum wage, improvement of starting salary scales, salary adjustments, exemption from income tax on labour pension funds, introduction of pension schemes, alterations in provisions dealing with the firing of employees without adequate reason, employing workers only on permanent basis, and the publication of *Voice of Labour*. The second category includes the demands of students and teachers. It requested the government to let students discuss the essence of the "Sector Review" before implementation, to provide free education for all and, to give immediate response to the demands of teachers. The third category of the list of demands can be described as general demands raised by the society at large, such as price control, prohibiting government officials from being board members in industrial establishments, giving employment priority to Ethiopians and creation of job opportunities for the unemployed. The last or the seventeenth demand of the resolution threatened the government with a general strike as of March 7, 1974, if it failed to address the aforesaid demands until the 6th of March 1974.⁵¹

⁵¹IES/CL, 2390/01/05; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, pp. 102-103; *Addis Zämān*, *Yekatit* 28, 1966EC(1March 1974).

At the beginning, *Lej Endalkačāw* was not surprised by the ultimatum of the confederation. He did not take it seriously; rather he was reassured by CELU's previous failures to carryout strike threats. As a result, he continued to downplay its capacity to undertake a general strike and denied the leaders of CELU an immediate response. In the meantime, however, he called the president of CELU to his office and asked him to retract the ultimatum. The president, however, responded that it was beyond his authority to retract the ultimatum but he promised to try to convince the General Council which had passed the resolution in his absence to do so. Nevertheless, after realizing that the president could not convince the General Council, the prime minister called some members of the council of ministers which was in the process of formation on 6 March 1974 and passed a decision that the government needed three to six weeks to solve all the problems raised by the confederation. Moreover, he announced that since some of the demands required legal provision and hence the decision of the legislative body, the parliament, time was needed.⁵²

After the decision of the council of ministers, the prime minister called the executive members of CELU to the imperial palace to get an audience with the emperor to discuss the issue. Nevertheless, before they met the emperor, the prime minister approached them again to revoke the call for a general strike and wait patiently until he organized his full cabinet and appropriately addressed their demands. His last minute attempt to negotiate with the executive members of CELU was, however, rebuffed outright by the latter. Consequently, they returned to their office without seeing the emperor.⁵³ Thus, it is possible to argue that the ultimatum was a

⁵²*Addis Zāmān*, *Yekatit* 28, 1966 EC; Ethiopian Herald, 7 March 1974; Seleshi, p. 10; Yä Mälāw Itēyopiya Säratāñoč Mahebār, "Yä Itēyopiya Säratāñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel I*, 1976 EC, p. 95; Informants: Beyene Solomon

⁵³Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy*...., p. 26.

landmark in which CELU began to engage in the political upheaval, besides pursuing its corporate interests.

As a result, the general strike was started as planned on 7 March 1974. It continued to paralyze the country's economy for about four days. As it was explained in the ultimatum, the strike was mainly caused by the protracted labour relation problems in the country. True, the stagnant economy and the subsequent inflationary problems of the country also further escalated the problems of workers and pushed them to call a general strike. The latter was, in fact, a national problem that affected every sections of the society including the workers. But, the national problem emboldened CELU to stick to its decision of undertaking a general strike. Consequently, more than 85,000 workers were believed to have participated in the strike throughout the country. Beside CELU's actual dues-paying 55,000 members, every worker regardless of his/her membership to a local union participated in the general strike. Moreover, organized workers in the public sector who were not yet recognized as unions joined the strike. The strike was, of course, very strong in Addis Ababa. During the strike, workers did not take to the streets as the students had done a week before, but they stopped work and remained at home. Some workers, however, went to the headquarters of the confederation and expressed their readiness to confront every challenge to their organization.⁵⁴

⁵⁴*Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 1, *Mägabit* 1966EC; Killion, p. 550; Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy*..., p. 127; *Addis Zämän*, *Mägabit* 3, 1966EC (12 March 1974).

Figure 3.1. The Ethiopian Workers gathered in their Headquarters during the General Strike



Source: *Mäsekäräm*, A Marxism-Leninism Ideological Bulletin, Vol. I, No. 4, 1973 EC, p. 28.

Union officials gathered in and around the Headquarters of CELU during the general strike.⁵⁵ It was the first successful general strike in the history of the confederation. It paralyzed the economy of the country in general and the capital city in particular. Industries were closed; shops, hotels and other public services were shutdown. Transport services were seriously disrupted, especially, in Addis Ababa. On the other hand, while the strike was going on, a serious discussion was also in progress between the government and the leaders of CELU. As a result, the strike came to an end after the government and the leaders of CELU reached an agreement on 10 March 1974. The agreement was reached after lengthy negotiations among officials from the prime minister's office, the MNCD and the leaders of CELU on the basis of the decision which was previously made by the Council of Ministers. On the same day, the emperor approved the agreement during an audience he granted at the Jubilee Palace to the leaders of CELU and the 14

⁵⁵*Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 1, *Mägabit* 1966EC.

committee members of the Chamber of Deputies set up to settle the strike. In the discussion, the emperor also praised the workers for their peaceful strike and promised them that the government was committed to solve the problems in accordance with the provisions outlined in the signed agreement. On the other hand, the leaders of CELU agreed to call off the strike and thanked the emperor for his keen interest to solve their problems.⁵⁶

After the agreement was signed, the leaders of CELU called off the strike and urged all Ethiopian workers to resume their work the next day. In a letter written from CELU to member local unions on 11 March 1974, the vice president of CELU, Alām Abdi, noted that:

...የሠራተኞች ጥቅምና መብት አልተጠበቀም በማለት ከየካቲት 28 ቀን ጀምሮ ጠቅላላ የሠራተኞች ሥራ ማቆም እንዲደረግ ተወስኖ ሥራውን ማቆማችንን እናስታውሳለን። ሆኖም ጥያቄያችን ውጤት ባገኘ ጊዜ በፌዴራል አማካኝነት ውጤት ይነገራል ያልነውንም እያስታወስን፤ አሁን የጠየቅናቸው ጥያቄዎች መልካም ውጤት አግኝተው ከመንግስት ጋር በስምምነት የጨረስን ስለሆነ በየስራችሁ እንድትገቡ እያስታወቅን ላደረጋችሁት ትብብር እናመሰግናለን። የስምምነቱንም ግልባጭ ከዚህ ጋር አባሪ አድርገን ልከናል።⁵⁷

...We would like to recall that we went on a general strike since 7 March 1974 by claiming that workers' rights and benefits were not respected. It can also be recalled that we promised to disclose the result for our demands through radio as soon as we get it. Now, since our demands brought good results and we concluded it in agreement with the government, thanking for your cooperation, we notify you to resume your work. We sent the copy of the agreement enclosed with this letter.

In the agreement, the two parties agreed to resolve all the seventeen demands within ten days, for those requiring legislative actions six months. The government also promised to present some of the demands which required legislation to the parliament and to follow up the implementation of

⁵⁶ *Addis Zāmān*, *Mägabit* 3, 1966EC (12 March 1974); *Ethiopian Herald*, 11 March 1974 (*Mägabit* 2, 1966EC); *Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 1, *Mägabit* 1966EC; Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy*..., p. 127; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 2, *Miyazeya* 1966EC; Tefera, *The Ethiopian Revolution*..., p. 96.

⁵⁷ IES/ CL 2390/01/14. A letter sent from CELU to its affiliates in *Mägabit* 2, 1966EC (11 March 1974).

each solution and take strict measures on officials creating trouble.⁵⁸ Even though CELU called off the strike after the signing of the agreement, the government failed to honor the agreement. Most of the terms of the agreement remained on paper. This resulted in the outbreak of sporadic strikes in different plants.⁵⁹ Despite the failure of the government to comply with the agreement, however, the general strike marked the highest point in the struggle between CELU and the state.

Be that as it may, the Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF) requested the government to take legal action against CELU for conducting "an illegal general strike". The spokesperson of the federation noted that CELU struck only after a three day notice instead of providing a sixty day notice as stipulated in the labour proclamation. Thus, CELU was held responsible for the employers' loss of more than \$10 million birr during the four day strike.⁶⁰ The spokesperson of EEF further added that every worker who participated in the strike should be liable to fines. On 23 March 1974, the spokesperson of the federation also disclosed that EEF already submitted a petition to the Labour Relations Board seeking a ruling on the "illegality" of the strike and asking for confirmation of the rights of the employers to exercise their prerogative to take measures in accordance with the law.⁶¹ But, the labour confederation described the employers' action as sort of adding insult to injury and strongly condemned the federation's callous attitude towards workers.⁶²

Despite the EEF's lamentation, the general strike exhibited the militancy and revolutionary zeal of the working class. Regarding this, Addis Hiwet noted that "... the general strike proved the

⁵⁸IES/CL, 2390/01/14, A letter sent from CELU to its affiliates in *Mägabit* 2, 1966EC (11March 1974); Ethiopian Herald, 12 March 1974 (*Mägabit* 3, 1966 EC).

⁵⁹Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel* 1, 1976 EC, p. 104.

⁶⁰Ethiopian Herald, 20 March 1974 (*Mägabit* 11, 1966 EC).

⁶¹Ethiopian Herald, 24 March 1974 (*Mägabit* 14, 1966EC).

⁶²Ethiopian Herald, 22 March 1974 (*Mägabit* 13, 1966 EC).

effective revolutionary strength of the young Ethiopian working class." He further added that "... the general strike was indeed a turning point not only in the participation of organized workers in the popular movement but also in its effect on the subsequent development of the popular democratic upsurge."⁶³ The general strike also contributed a lot to the radicalization of the working class, especially the white collar workers. As it was the first general strike in CELU's history, workers exhibited their militancy and radical moves against the state. Besides their corporate interest, workers raised purely political questions on behalf of teachers, students, and other sections of the society.⁶⁴

But, the significance of the general strike in radicalizing the Ethiopian working class has remained a debatable issue among prominent scholars. Disregarding the radical political issues raised by CELU, Seleshi Sisay, Marina Ottaway and Rene Lefort argued that CELU was not ready for radical reforms; rather it worked hard to fulfill its corporate interests and increase the number of its member unions by organizing new unions in both parastatal and statal industrial firms. Seleshi further noted that the purpose of the general strike was merely to improve the socio-economic and material conditions of the workers and had no radical political objectives. He relegated political questions raised during the general strike as general questions that could not show the political aspirations of the workers.⁶⁵ Ottaway and Lefort also argued that CELU was not attracted by radical reform; rather, it aimed at only fulfilling workers' corporate interests

⁶³Addis Hiwet, p. 106.

⁶⁴Killion, p. 550; Seleshi Sisay, "Labour in Contemporary Ethiopian Politics: The Case of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions and its First General Strike" A Paper Presented to the 71st Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Society in New York City, September 1976, p. 8; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratāñoč Andenät Mahebär: Wuledät Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 E.C/2012), p. 139; *Addis Zämän*, *Mägabit* 3, 1966 E.C (12 March 1974).

⁶⁵Seleshi, p. 8.

and increasing the power of the organization.⁶⁶ Ottaway further stressed that “...the CELU leadership was not yet interested in launching a revolutionary workers’ movement.” She further argued that the leadership of CELU made great attempt in the general strike to air its specific grievances rather than promoting the radical questions raised by the society at large.⁶⁷ During the strike, for instance, the president of CELU also affirmed that the strike had no political objectives.⁶⁸

Contrary to the aforementioned arguments, however, some scholars argued that the general strike strengthened the militancy of workers and pushed them to reflect very radical ideas during the 1974 revolution. They further argued that workers in different industrial plants, for instance, demanded the dismissal of managers, free education, price control, freedom of expression and the right to strike. These were all, undoubtedly, radical questions raised by the workers and other civilian leftist groups. The proponents of this argument even dared to argue that the general strike can by itself be considered as a radical move highly influenced by the tide of the revolution because CELU had never carried out a general strike before. Among others, Patrick Gilkes stated that the general strike heralded the militancy of the workers and intensified radicalism in Ethiopia. He further argued that “...such a radicalization of the industrial proletariat is of considerable importance considering the class divisions of the Ethiopian state and introduce a new dimension into the political possibilities [sic].”⁶⁹ Kiflu Tadesse also argued that “...the role of the Ethiopian workers at this stage of the movement became more pronounced when the Ethiopian working class, led by its more radical wing of labour leaders, staged a four

⁶⁶Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire...*, p. 43; Lefort, p. 55.

⁶⁷Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire...*, pp. 42-43.

⁶⁸Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär, “Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Enqeseqasè...,” p. 139; Lefort, p. 142; Ethiopian Herald, March 12, 1974 (*Mägabit* 3, 1966 EC), p. 1.

⁶⁹Gilkes, p. 169.

day strike.”⁷⁰ Bahru Zewde also further stressed that the four day general strike witnessed the transformation of CELU from a state of extreme torpor or lethargy into a militant organization.⁷¹ Thus, one can argue that the ensuing general strike not only witnessed the high point of workers’ organized action against the government to defend their corporate interests but also marked the emergence of a radical group of workers in the organization. More importantly, the four day general strike demonstrated the existence of radical white collar workers in every industrial establishment.

Apart from the radicalization of most of the white collar workers, however, the leaders of the confederation were not ready to lead them in the direction of a defined political goal. Being the only legally organized institution during the outbreak of the revolution, CELU should have played a much better role in mobilizing the society for the revolution. It had the opportunity to benefit a lot from the revolution and occupy a conspicuous political place in the country after the revolution. But, it ended up [through no fault of its own] becoming a battleground for the civilian left and the military who struggled to control power and establish a socialist Ethiopia over the ruins of the monarchy.⁷² The failure of CELU to get appropriate benefit from the revolution was apparently attributed to the internal division of the organization, the enduring subservience of the leadership and the persistent repression waged by security forces. Regarding the internal division Seleshi noted that while the radical white collar workers used the general strike as an important stage to reflect the political demands of society and push for political reform in the country, the leadership of CELU and the blue collar workers merely expected improvement of their economic conditions from the general strike. He further added that since the workers had different

⁷⁰Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party from the Early Beginning to 1975, Part I* (Trenton: Independent Publisher, 1993), p. 111.

⁷¹Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (Oxford: James Currey Ltd, 2002), p. 231.

⁷²Killion, p. 554.

expectations from the general strike in accordance with their socio-economic status and level of political consciousness, they failed to push the general strike beyond four days with a view to leading the revolution and seizing political power.⁷³ Be that as it may, the absence of party politics in the country and the barring of labour unions from any political engagement apparently restricted CELU from aiming to control political power.

Besides radicalizing the white collar workers, the general strike consolidated the unity of workers for collective action and this in turn helped CELU to increase the number of its affiliates or member unions. In spite of numerous attempts to divide the labour movement on various grounds and in spite of the inadequate preparation for the strike because of the short notice given to them, workers exhibited their unity and militancy. It was a historic occasion in which workers demonstrated their strength, unity and responsibility. Besides unifying the workers themselves, the general strike had a mobilizing effect on the rest of the Ethiopian people. For instance, it was during and after the general strike that the labour movement began to be a voice for the Ethiopian toiling masses. The radical white collar workers played a significant role in this regard.⁷⁴ Regarding the mobilizing effect of the general strike over society, Addis Hiwet noted: "...In short, the general strike opened a new vista: a movement rich and varied in its forms of manifestations-the lower echelon against the highest echelon, the Ethiopian Third Estate against the Feudo-Bourgeois dictatorship of decades, plebeians against patricians, the forces of lower classes against the ruling classes."⁷⁵

⁷³Seleshi, p. 9.

⁷⁴*Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 1, *Mägabit* 1966EC; IES/CL 2400/01/02, A paper anonymously written and demonized Endalkačāw Mäkonän on *Yekatit* 22, 1966EC (1 March 1974).

⁷⁵Addis, p. 107.

The other significant effect of the general strike was the growth in the membership of CELU. The demand of some employees of statal and parastatal organizations to form unions was one of the causes of the general strike. In the aftermath of the strike, employees of several plants organized their own unions. The agreement signed between CELU and the government opened the door for previously unorganized employees of both statal and parastatal organizations to form unions. The agreement is stated as "...ለመንግስት ሠራተኞች መተዳደሪያ በ1954 ዓ.ም በወጣው ትዕዛዝና በተከታታይ ሕጎች ውስጥ የተዘረዘረውን መብትና ጥቅም ሁሉ የሚያገኙ የማናቸውም መንግስታዊ ድርጅት ሠራተኞች በአዋጅ ቁጥር 210/56 አንቀፅ 21 መሰረት ካመለከቱ የሰራተኛ ማህበር ለማቋቋም ተፈቅዶላቸዋል።"⁷⁶ Thus, using the provision of Article 21 of the proclamation, a number of unions were established across the country in the aftermath of the general strike. In Šäwa and Eritrea alone, for instance, employees of more than 60 private and government organizations formed unions and applied for registration to the MNCD. Among others, employees of Ethiopian Electric Light and Power Authority (EELPA), Imperial Telecommunications Board, Imperial Highway Authority, National Bank of Ethiopia, Imperial Tobacco Monopoly, Addis Ababa Municipality, Addis Ababa Water and Sewerage, Haile Selassie I Foundation, Agro-Industrial Development Bank, Central Pharmaceutical Corporation and many others organized trade unions and applied for registration. The formation of these unions increased the number of trade unions in the country to 180 (with 90,000) registered active members within three weeks alone following the end of the general strike.⁷⁷

At the beginning, CELU was established with 29 affiliated unions with a total membership of 15,000 in 1963. Within five years, the number of unions grew to 108 with a total membership of

⁷⁶"...All employees of governmental agencies, whose rights and interests have been covered by the civil service regulations of 1962 and subsequent regulations, are granted the right to form unions in accordance with proclamation 210/1963 Article 21." *Addis Zäman, Mägabiti* 3, 1966 EC (12 March, 1974).

⁷⁷*Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 1, *Mägabiti* 1966EC; Ethiopian Herald, 28 March 1974 (*Mägabiti* 19, 1966 EC).

55, 000.⁷⁸ Ten years later, membership in terms of unions has grown seven-fold to 146 and five-fold to 71, 000 in terms of the number of its registered workers.⁷⁹ Within five months of the 1974 revolution, the number of affiliated member unions to CELU reached 227 within an estimated total membership of 200,000.⁸⁰ Despite the increase in the number of labour unions in the country, the demands of workers remained unresolved for a long time after the general strike. Consequently, discontented workers in the public sector continued to undertake sporadic strikes against the government.⁸¹

3.3. CELU at the Crossroads: The Infiltration of the Nascent Leftist Parties

"Every major socialist revolution has its leftist opposition, and the Ethiopian revolution proved no exception."⁸²

On 10 March 1974, following the signing of an agreement with the government, CELU called off the strike. On the same day, Prime Minister Endalkačāw Mäkonän called the leaders of CELU to the Imperial Palace for an audience with the emperor. On the occasion, he promised to the leaders of CELU that his government was committed to solve their problems and urged them to be patient. The leaders of CELU, on their part, agreed to urge members of CELU to resume their work by the next day, 11 March 1974. They also announced to each local union that the

⁷⁸A Special Brochure Prepared on the Occasion of the 5th CELU Annual Conference and Anniversary, *Mägabit* 28, 1960 EC (April 6, 1968), p. 17.

⁷⁹*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue for CELU's 10 Years Anniversary, *Miyazeya*, 1966EC (April, 1974).

⁸⁰*Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 3, *Genbot* 1966EC (May 1974).

⁸¹Markakis and Nega, p. 112.

⁸²Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire...*, p. 99.

agreement was concluded in favor of the workers and urged them to cooperate in the implementation.⁸³

Even though the prime minister promised to deal with all the demands of CELU in accordance with the agreement reached, he failed to keep many of his promises in the subsequent months. He also engaged in organizing security personnel and repressing unions that went on strike in various plants. As a result, unions affiliated to CELU, together with the formerly unorganized statal and parastatal employees, went on strike against the new prime minister and his government in the aftermath of the general strike.⁸⁴ Most of the employees demanded the right to form unions and the removal of corrupt and irresponsible managers. A wave of workers' strikes, boycotts and militant actions by employees of both statal and parastatal organizations pressurized the staggering imperial regime from the beginning of March till the end of April. Among others, employees of the Post Office, Ministry of Finance, Haile Selassie I University, Addis Ababa Municipality, the emperor's own Haile Selassie I Foundation went on strike against the government. These strikes strengthened the momentum of the popular movement by paralyzing the political and socio-economic activities of the country in general and Addis Ababa in particular. In addition to voicing their corporate interests, most of the strikers demanded the right to form unions and the removal and punishment of officials who were suspected of corruption and abuse of power.⁸⁵

Employees of statal and parastatal organizations believed that they were not public servants and demanded the right to form trade unions as stipulated under the provision of Article 2/f/IV of the

⁸³*Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 1, *Mägabit* 1966EC; *Addis Zämän*, *Mägabit* 3, 1966EC (12 March 1974).

⁸⁴Killion, pp. 550-551.

⁸⁵IES/CL,1776/01/16.2, *Yä Säfiw Hezeb Demeş* No. 14, *Hedar*10, 1967EC (19 November 1974)
;Markakis and Nega, p. 113.

Labour Relations Proclamation 210/1963. The proclamation stated that: "...a person employed by any industrial, commercial or other profit making enterprises administered by the government or its administrative or technical departments shall not, for the purpose hereof, be not considered a public servant."⁸⁶

Most of the employees in parastatal organizations took this article as granting them the right to form trade unions and applied to the MNCD for registration. Despite the provision of the proclamation, however, the MNCD refused to register and recognize the newly formed trade unions. Interestingly enough, though the provision precluded employees of the public sector to form trade unions, they went on strike and demanded the right to form trade unions besides voicing their legitimate demands, such as health safety, pension, insurance, pay raise and the removal of callous managers.

The strike was spearheaded by employees of parastatal organizations immediately after CELU called the general strike off. Employees of the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority, for instance, went on strike on 11 March 1974 demanding the right to get free medical service, insurance, pension and the right to form unions. As a result, both international and local flights were interrupted completely for about two days. After an arrangement was made between the government and the representatives of the workers' committee, however, they resumed work and international flights resumed on 13 March 1974.⁸⁷ Likewise, on 14 March 1974, about 350 employees of the Ethiopian Tobacco Monopoly in Addis Ababa went on strike demanding the dismissal of corrupt officials and the right to organize trade unions. Besides demanding the right

⁸⁶*Nägarit Gazèta*, Labour Relations Proclamation No. 210/1963, 1 November, 1963.

⁸⁷*Addis Zämän*, *Mägabit* 5, 1966EC (14 March 1974); Killion, p. 553; Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 44; Markakis and Nega, p.112.

to form trade union, they requested immediate pay increase, overtime pay, bonus and better health care. They also demanded the dismissal of Tadässä Yaqob, the Chairman of the company.⁸⁸

Another stiff opposition against the government came from the employees of the Ethiopian Telecommunications Board Authority. On 11 March 1974, they submitted 38 demands, to the chairman of the Board, Bäteru Admasè, including the right to form trade unions and the removal of some officials. Nevertheless, the chairman denied them the right to form trade unions and get their corporate demands. The Labour Relations Board in the MNCD also refused to recognize and register their trade union, thereby supporting the decision of the organization. These actions annoyed the employees' representatives and pushed them to work as a union as of 2 April 1974 without any recognition from the concerned bodies.⁸⁹ Though they tried to function as a union, the Labour Relations Board in the MNCD refused to accept their appeal and to work with the unrecognized trade union. As a result, the employees went on strike from April 30 to May 3 until the National Security Commission (NSC) forced them to start work. Despite the repression waged against them, they continued their struggle until the end of June. In May, the NSC focused its repression on the employees of the Telecommunications Authority.⁹⁰ Moreover, employees of the Ethiopian Electric Light and Power Authority (EELPA), National Bank, the Post Office and etc also struck against the government.⁹¹ Most of the employees of the statal and parastatal organizations, besides voicing their corporate interests, demanded the right to form unions and the dismissal of corrupt officials.

⁸⁸Ethiopian Herald, March 15, 1974 (*Mägabit* 6, 1966EC).

⁸⁹IES/CL, 2390/01/42, A letter sent from the committee to all employees 2 April 1974 (*Mägabit* 24, 1966 EC).

⁹⁰Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 49; IES/CL2390/01/56, A letter sent from the committee to the army and the people of Ethiopia.

⁹¹Andargachew Tiruneh, pp. 47-48.

In addition to the strikes carried out by parastatal organizations, employees of statal organizations went on strike against the government in the aftermath of the general strike. Among others, employees the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Agriculture, Haile Selassie I University and Addis Ababa Municipal Services went on strike.⁹² On 22 March 1974, for instance, the employees of the Addis Ababa Municipality elected their representatives and submitted a twenty three point list of demands to the Mayor, Hailä Giyorgis Worqenäh. The demands included a range of rights and benefits, including the right to form trade unions, pay rise, insurance, overtime payment, severance pay, minimum wage, health safety and many others. Moreover, they threatened the mayor with strike on 28 March 1974 if he failed to respond to their demands appropriately by 27 March 1974.⁹³ The mayor, however, disregarded the demands and ultimatum of the workers' representatives and began to intimidate them through newspapers and other media outlets starting from 23 March 1974.⁹⁴ Regardless, the workers went on strike on 28 March 1974. The strike made the roads of the city to be filled with trash and garbage. Consequently, the police tried to clear the trash from the roads of the city on 5 April 1974 until the employees reached an agreement with the mayor. But, the workers stepped up their demands by asking for the removal of the mayor.⁹⁵

Similarly, employees of the Ministry of Finance submitted twenty two demands to the Minister, Nāgaš Dästa, on 27 March 1974. They demanded, among others, the right to from unions, the removal of some corrupt and irresponsible officials, pay rise, overtime payment. But, Nāgaš

⁹²Killion, p. 553.

⁹³IES/CL, 2390/01/15, A Letter sent from the Representative Committee to the Mayor in *Mägabiti* 14, 1966EC (23 March 1974).

⁹⁴IES/CL, 2390 /01/16, A Letter sent from the Representative Committee to the Workers in *Mägabiti* 16, 1966EC (25 March 1974).

⁹⁵IES/CL, 2390/01/43, A Letter sent from the Representative Committee to the Coordinating Army Committee in *Mägabiti* 19, 1966 EC (28 March 1974).

failed to respond to their demands in a timely manner. As a result, the employees went on strike for one and a half day and resumed work only after they eventually received a fair reply to their twenty two demands from the Ministry on 16 April 1974. Even though all their demands were not yet appropriately addressed, they got three of the ministry's officials dismissed in accordance with their request and the minister also agreed to meet all of the remaining demands within a short period of time. Nevertheless, the minister rejected the workers' demand to form trade unions on the ground that there was no legal provision that guaranteed civil servants the right to form unions.⁹⁶

Even though the strikes conducted in March and April were dominated mainly by employees of statal and parastatal organizations, employees of some CELU affiliated unions that had been weakened by unlawful acts of their respective management bodies were also reorganized and went on strike and challenged both their employers and the state. For instance, Lazaradis Cotton Company Workers Union, Addis Ababa Grocery and Laundry Workers Unions elected their leaders and started functioning with a new spirit and threatened the management with strike. Similarly, in Eritrea, Ethio-Field Workers Union, Ethio-Textile Workers Union, and Ima Sweater Factory Workers Union were reorganized and petitioned the government for better benefits.⁹⁷ But, there were also times when both employees of private, semi-government and government organizations went on strike together against employers and the state. In April 11 and 13, for example, employees of the *Anbäsa* Bus Company (Lion Bus), Addis Ababa Municipality, Railway and Augusta Garment Factory struck together demanding the dismissal of their

⁹⁶IES/CL, 2390/01/41, A Letter sent from the Minister of Finance, Nägaš Dästa to the Employees of the Ministry; Ethiopian Herald, 17 April 1974 (*Miyazeya* 9, 1966 EC).

⁹⁷*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 11, No. 1, *Mägabit* 1966 EC (March 1974)

respective managers.⁹⁸ Thus, one can argue that employees of statal and parastatal organizations, supported by employees of some CELU affiliated unions, contributed a lot to the momentum of the 1974 revolution, particularly in March and April when the soldiers returned to their barracks. CELU also expressed its solidarity by recognizing the newly established trade unions in statal and parastatal organizations.

In March, the Prime Minister was engaged in organizing his own cabinet and trying to address issues in the army. Once he met the demands of the army and brought under control in March the alleged plot against him by members of the former cabinet, the Prime Minister turned against the popular movement in April. In a letter written to CELU on 30 April 1974, for instance, the Minister of Defense labeled the leaders of CELU as conspirators and threatened to close the organization's office.⁹⁹

Perhaps, one of the factors for the failure of the prime minister to keep his promises and engage subsequently in the repression of trade unions was the opposition that came from the leaders of the Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF) against the already signed agreement between CELU and the government. On 20 March 1974, EEF filed its case against CELU in the Labour Relations Board asking it to declare the general strike 'illegal' and to abrogate the agreement reached between CELU and the imperial government. It argued that since CELU called the strike after only a three day notice instead of giving a 60 day notice as stipulated in the labour proclamation, the government should regard it as 'illegal' and make CELU responsible for every loss that the employers incurred as a result of the general strike. In the charge filed against

⁹⁸*Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 2, *Miyazeya* 1966EC (April 1974); *Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 3, May 1974; IES/CL, 1775/01/1.24, *Democracia*, Ter 21, 1967EC (29 January 1975)

⁹⁹*Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 2, *Miyazeya* 1966EC (April, 1974); Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär: Wuledät...*, pp. 140-141.

CELU, the employers also disclosed that they had incurred a loss of over \$10 million because of the general strike. It also requested the Board that the employees should not be entitled to any remuneration for the strike period.¹⁰⁰ But, CELU rejected the legal action filed against it and warned the federation to step back from aggravating the already fragile economy of the country. In a written reply submitted to the Labour Relations Board of the MNCD on 21 March 1974, it rebuked EEF for trying to repudiate the agreement entered between it and the government and incite another general strike. It considered the charge as an insult against the confederation and strongly condemned the federation for its callous attitude towards workers.¹⁰¹

On 20 April 1974, the Labour Relations Board, however, decided in favor of the EEF by calling the general strike illegal. The Board decided that the four day general strike called by CELU on March 7 was a serious act committed outside its mandate. It also rejected the workers' demand for payment for the work-stoppage period which was in contravention of the Labour Relations Proclamation. The Board considered all aspects of the general strike according to Proclamation 210/1963 which required a 60 day notice for such an act and decided that the work-stoppage was 'illegal'. It also noted that even though the government signed an accord with CELU, it cannot over-ride the already established laws. The leaders of CELU, however, rejected the decision of the Board indicating that the Board had neither the jurisdiction to consider the question of legality of the general strike nor the power to abrogate the agreement reached between CELU and the government.¹⁰² The decision of the Board, however, further aggravated sporadic strikes in the country around the end of April and the beginning of May.

¹⁰⁰Ethiopian Herald, 21 March 1974 (*Mägabit* 12, 1966EC).

¹⁰¹Ethiopian Herald, 22 March 1974 (*Mägabit* 13, 1966EC).

¹⁰²Ethiopian Herald, 24 April 1974 (*Miyazeya* 16, 1966 EC).

Those sporadic strikes had no chance, however, to be transformed into a general strike because of the brutal repression waged by the government. Even though the new prime minister had established a committee called the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces and the Police, led by Colonel Alām Zāwed Tässāma from the Air Borne Brigade in the middle of April, it was not effective in quelling strikes. As a result, a new notorious committee, the National Security Commission (NSC), was established by the Minister of Defense, Lieutenant General Abiye Abābā in collaboration with Prime Minister Endalkačāw Mākonān at the end of April. It was mainly used to suppress the strikes by employees of statal and parastatal organizations. Following the decision of the Labour Relations Board in favor of the employers, by calling the March general strike 'illegal', on 20 April 1974, the government began to apply very harsh laws on strikes and demonstrations.¹⁰³

On 29 April 1974, the prime minister urged employees of governmental agencies to refrain from any kind of demonstrations and strikes. But, he granted them the right to petition the government peacefully. He also noted that the government was ready to use security forces against those who went on strike transgressing the law.¹⁰⁴ A committee in the Ministry of Defence also sent a stern warning to CELU to stop inciting the employees of the public sector to go out on strike. In the letter, the committee called all affiliated unions to CELU to refrain from any activities damaging to the country's peace and tranquility and the welfare of the people. It also noted that if CELU continued to agitate any employee of the public sector, the government would automatically close the headquarters of the confederation.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³Andargachew Tiruneh, pp. 51-52, Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire...*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁰⁴Ethiopian Herald, 30 April 1974 (*Miyazeya* 22, 1966EC).

¹⁰⁵Ethiopian Herald, 1 May 1974 (*Miyazeya* 23, 1966EC); Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire...*, p. 38.

In a letter addressed to Prime Minister *Lej* Endalkačāw Mäkonän, with copies to the emperor, the Parliament, the Ministries of National Defense, Interior and National Community Development and Social Affairs, the General Council of CELU noted that the confederation fought for the maintenance of law and order and for attaining industrial peace. But, it also expressed its outright rejection of the letter of the committee organized under the Ministry of Defence in which the government conveyed its intention to use CELU as a scapegoat for the sporadic unrest and strikes by government employees. In the letter, it stated:

...በመከላከያ ሚኒስቴር የተቋቋመ ኮሚቴ ሚያዝያ 22 ቀን 1966 ዓ.ም ለኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች አንድነት ማህበር የሰጡትን ማስጠንቀቂያ በመገረም ተመልክተናል።...የኢ.ሠ.አ.ማ ጠቅላይ ምክር ቤት ማስጠንቀቂያውን መርምሮ ኢ.ሠ.አ.ማ በመሰረታዊ ደንቡና በሕጉ መሰረት እየሰራ፤ እንደ አንድ አገርን ሊያጠፋ እንደተነሣ ድርጅት ተቆጥሮ፤ በማያውቀውና ባልፈፀመው ወንጀል እንዲዘጋ በመከላከያ ሚኒስቴር ከተቋቋመው ኮሚቴ የተሰጠውን ማስጠንቀቂያ ባለመቀበልና፤ የሠራተኛውንና የሕብረተሰቡን ነፃነት ለማስፋፋት አዲሱ ካቢኔ ከገባው ቃልኪዳን ውጪ የማሕበሮቹን መሰረታዊ መብት የሚነካ ዛቻ በመሰንዘሩ የተሰማውን ጥልቅ ሀዘን በመግለፅ፤ ሰራተኞች መብታቸውን የሚነካ በሚወስድባቸው ማናቸውንም ዓይነት እርምጃ ቢጋርዮሽ ለመቋቋም አባል ማሕበሮች በሙሉ በተጠንቀቅ እንዲጠብቁ መወሰኑን በትህትና እንገልጻለን።¹⁰⁶

...We have looked in surprise at the warning which was given to CELU by a committee organized under the Ministry of Defense on 30 April 1974. ...The council of CELU analyzed the warning and rejected it on the ground that it was decided based on unknown and uncommitted crime by regarding CELU, which have been working in accordance with its regulation and the labour relations law, as an organization which foils to destroy the nation. And, expressing its deep sorrow to the new cabinet which broke its promises of safeguarding the freedom of the society and the workers, and passed the ultimatum that threatened the right of workers, we humbly disclosed that all affiliated unions should wait prudent to withstand in cooperation to any possible action to be taken against the right of workers.

After late April 1974, the government used the NSC to reassert its authority. It was mainly used to break strikes by employees of Telecommunications Board, Ethiopian Electric Light and Power Authority, Imperial Highway Authority, Heavy Freight Transport and Postal Service. The

¹⁰⁶Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency (ENALA), 17.1.18.83.07, A Letter written from Beyene Solomon to Prime Minister Endalkačāw Mäkonän, *Miyazeya* 23, 1966 EC(1 May 1974); *Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 2, *Miyazeya*, 1966EC (April, 1974).

commission also issued public warnings and threatened to close the labour confederation if it did not refrain from agitating public servants to strike. During May and June, the state suppressed strikes in private enterprises. In June 1974, for instance, 300 striking motor transport workers were arrested and some members were also wounded by the police at the CELU headquarters.¹⁰⁷

Employees of the Telecommunication Board were the ones who faced the most severe repression by the NSC. The representatives of the employees of the Telecommunication Board applied for registration on 11 March 1974 to the Labour Relations Board. Since the Board refused to register them within a month, they declared that their union was a legally established one as of 11 April 1974 as per Proclamation No. 210/1963. On 23 April 1974, however, the Board ruled that it would not recognize the establishment of a union by employees of the Telecommunications Board because the country's labour law did not allow government employees to form unions.¹⁰⁸

On 10 May 1974, the representatives of the employees of the Telecommunications Board submitted a thirty eight point petition to the commission and requested it to address their demands in consultation with the management of the company. The commission, however, disagreed the removal of six top officials of the Board demanded by the employees on the ground that there was not enough evidence to remove them.¹⁰⁹ On 25 May, the representatives of the employees of the Board held a meeting with all workers of the Board and conveyed to them that the commission had refused to address their problems. This announcement was also followed by intimidation and arrest of most of the representatives of the employees. On 31 May, the employees of the Board announced their situation to the Ethiopian people, claiming that the

¹⁰⁷IES/CL, 1775/01/1.1, *Democracia*, No. 1, probably early July 1974; Killion, p. 555.

¹⁰⁸Ethiopian Herald, 25 April 1974 (*Miyazeya* 17, 1966 EC)

¹⁰⁹IES/CL, 2390/01/31, A Letter written from the Representatives of the Employees of the Telecommunication Board to Brigadier General Gerema Fälākä, one of the Surrogate of the NSC in *Genbot* 2, 1966 EC (10 May 1974).

commission continued to misrepresent their demands and to repress them. The repression of the commission continued and this forced them to resume work on 6 June with the sole demand now that their detained colleagues be released.¹¹⁰

In addition to the employees of the Telecommunication Board, the National Security Commission intervened in the dispute between workers and management in several plants. Among others, it tried to resolve the dispute between the employees of the General Postal Office and Diabaco Cotton Spinning Factory and their respective managements. It had the highest security power in the nation and was responsible to control all strikes and demonstrations.¹¹¹ Besides its stern warning to CELU, it also kept a close watch on the headquarters of the confederation in suspicion of any possible strike. It almost took over the duty of the Labour Relations Board. It had the power to hear the petition of workers and organizations. "The commission was just a state within a state."¹¹² As a result of the repression of the NSC, the strike by employees of the public sectors and other civil uprisings eventually came to an end in June 1974.

Despite its repression under the NSC, the leaders of CELU had no clear political objectives to give political direction to the labour movement during the heydays of the revolution from April to September 1974. Since they were ambivalent on the momentum of the revolution, they continued to be subservient to the state. Moreover, CELU's poor organizational structure and lack of enlightened and politically conscious leadership also undermined its ability to play a leading role in the political developments during the revolution. As a result, its role was confined

¹¹⁰IES/CL, 2390/01/32 A Letter from the Employees of the Telecommunication Board to the Ethiopian People in *Genbot* 23, 1966EC (1May 1974); Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 53.

¹¹¹Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 54.

¹¹²Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*, p. 102.

to fighting for the corporate interests of its members. Unlike other trade unions' leaders who controlled political power in ex-colonial Africa, the leaders of CELU did not work to bring any change in the system of government and control political power.¹¹³

In addition, the small size of CELU's membership, the corporatist nature of the organizational structure of the confederation and the absence of political organizations in the country might have hindered the leadership to engage in any political struggle in the country. Furthermore, I also share the argument of Marina Ottaway regarding the failure of CELU to lead the 1974 revolution. She asserted that: "...the claims made later by radicals that military intervention snuffed out a revolutionary workers' movement remain unconvincing. From the radicals' viewpoint, the spontaneous civilian agitation in early 1974 came too soon, before they had the capacity to channel popular discontent into a political movement."¹¹⁴ This gave an opportunity for the military to control power. The civilian leftist parties which tried to share power at the eleventh hour became prey to the military.

On 28 June 1974, the NSC was dissolved by the newly formed committee comprised of radical junior officers, the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and the Territorial Army (the *Därg* as it is more commonly known) that transformed the corporatist civil uprising into a revolution that culminated in the dissolution of the imperial regime. The committee came to the forefront and seized state power and continued arresting many members of the ruling class. True, this move was supported by the civilian left including, CELU. The dissolution of NSC and

¹¹³Tefera, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*, p. 64; Killion, p. 556.

¹¹⁴Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire...*, p. 39.

the formation of the *Därg* temporarily enabled CELU to resume its campaign of organizing trade unions in government organizations throughout the month of July and August.¹¹⁵

On 8 July 1974, the *Därg* requested CELU to support the newly introduced national objective, "*Iteyopiya Teqdām*" ("Ethiopia First"). It further urged workers to stop demonstrations and engaging in any adverse activities that hindered the development of the country. It added that:

...ኢትዮጵያ ትቅደም በሚል ዓላማ የተጀመረው ወታደራዊ እንቅስቃሴ ትኩረት በአሁኑ ወቅት የወታደራዊው ደርግ ጠቅላላ ለአገሪቱ ዕድገትና መሻሻል የተጠና እርምጃ በመውሰድ ላይ ስለሆነ፤ የሥራ ማቆምና የሠራተኞች ውዝግብ፤ አድማ፤ በድምሩ ለህዝብ እድገትና የጋራ ጥቅም የተነሳሳንበትን ዓላማ ከግቡ ለማድረስ የአሰራር ችግር እንዳይፈጥርብን፤ በእናንተ በኩል በጥንቃቄ ታስቦበት ውሳኔው መልክ እስኪይዝልን፤ የኢንዱስትሪ ሥራና ሠራተኛን በሚመለከቱ ጉዳዮች ሙሉ ትብብራችሁ እንዳይለየን በአክብሮት እናሳስባለን።¹¹⁶

...The military movement which was started with the objective of "Ethiopia First" is now heeding for the overall progress and development of the country with the well thought-out measure of the *Därg*. Since work stoppage, labour dispute and strike would hinder us from achieving our very objective, the development and mutual benefit of the people, we kindly request you to continue your full cooperation on issues of industrial labour relations until our decision came on track.

The coordinating committee refined its motto, "Ethiopia First", as a philosophy with thirteen major points on 10 July 1974. One of the points of the policy framework or the philosophy was drafted in line with the aspirations of the workers. It stated that: "...When we say "*Iteyopiya Teqedām*", we mean for Ethiopians to be able to work together and benefit together, every citizen should have an equal privilege to medical and health care in order to enhance physical and mental well-being."¹¹⁷ The General Council of CELU welcomed the abolition of the NSC which used to function under the Ministry of Defence and had stifled the labour movement in the country. It also expressed CELU's solidarity with the *Därg* in the effort of realizing its policy

¹¹⁵Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 64; Tefera Haile Selassie, p. 103.

¹¹⁶CETU, BOX, No. 42, File No. 05, A Letter sent from the Chairman of the *Därg* to CELU in July 1, 1966EC (8 July 1974)

¹¹⁷Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*, p. 135.

framework as outlined in the new philosophy. In a press release given on 11 July 1974, the General Council expressed its readiness to participate in the realization of the new philosophy, "*Iteyopiya Teqdām*".¹¹⁸ Besides supporting the abolition of the NSC and the policy framework of the *Därg*, the General Council that held its meeting from July 6 to July 10, 1974 at the headquarters of CELU requested the coordinating committee to meet the demands of workers outlined in the agreement formerly concluded between CELU and the government.¹¹⁹ In its July editorial, the *Voice of Labour*, the confederation's monthly magazine, also stated that: "...የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች አንድነት ማህበር ለጦር ኅይለኛ ለፖሊስና ለብሔራዊ ጦር አባሎች የተቀደሰ አዲስ ዓላማ ተባባሪነታቸውን በቅድሚያ ከገለጡት ግምባር ቀደም ድርጅቶች አንዱ ነው። ኢትዮጵያ ትቅደም የሚለው የጥሪ ድምፅ በኢትዮጵያውያን ዘንድ አዲስ የተሰፋ የመተሳሰብና የእውነተኝነት ስሜትን ፈጥሯል።"¹²⁰

Even though CELU expressed its full cooperation to the *Därg*, the leaders of CELU did not escape from the attacks of the coordinating committee. The *Därg* waged its attacks not only on the leaders of CELU but also on the entire aristocracy and the emperor throughout July and August. During those months, the leader of CELU, Beyene Solomon, realized that his subordination to the imperial regime could no longer continue. It was thus, the military takeover of power that apparently forced Beyene to resign before his third term expired. But, he notified the 276 affiliates of CELU found across the country that he had decided to resign by the end of next February for "personal reasons". Beyene had served the confederation for 12 years as its

¹¹⁸Ethiopian Herald, 12 July 1974 (*Hämlè* 5, 1966EC).

¹¹⁹Yä Iteyopiya Säratāñoč Andenät Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratāñoč Enqeseqasè...., p. 103; *Voice of Labour* Vol. XI, No. 5, July 1974.

¹²⁰"...The Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU) was one of the first forefront organizations to give its full support to the new motto of the Coordinating Committee of the Armed forces, Police and Territorial Army. "Ethiopia First" has kindled a new spirit, new hope, sympathy and a sense of sincerity amongst Ethiopians." You can also look in the *Voice of Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 5, *Hämlè* 1966EC (July 1974).

Secretary General and later as its President. He submitted his resignation letter to CELU and its affiliates on 29 August 1974.¹²¹

Since the demands of the workers were not solved up to the end of August, CELU leaders, prompted by the white collar workers, were determined to raise those demands once again as their top agenda in the upcoming General Council meeting which had already been planned to be held from 15 to 16 September 1974. It was while CELU was preparing for its General Council meeting that the *Därg* assumed power by deposing Emperor Haile Selassie I on 12 September 1974. Though the demands of CELU were not yet answered, it supported the actions of the *Därg* against the emperor and his subordinates.¹²² As it was the first organization to send a letter supporting the measures taken by the coordinating committee from the end of June to early September, it was also the first in opposing the coming to power of the military on 12 September 1974. As a result, the relationship between the *Därg* and CELU began to deteriorate right from the very day when the *Därg* assumed power. The main source of their disagreement was Proclamation No. 1 of 1974. As the General Council annual meeting had already been planned to be held from 15 to 16 September 1974, the president of CELU wrote a letter to the office of the provisional military government on 14 September 1974 and requested permission to hold its meeting as already planned. Nevertheless, the government failed to respond to CELU's letter; rather it regarded the letter as anti-revolutionary propaganda.¹²³

¹²¹Ethiopian Herald, 1 September 1974 (*Nähäse* 26, 1966EC); Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär: Wuldät...*, p.142.

¹²²Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Mägäläçawoç," pp. 1-2; IES/CL 2390/01/49; *Democracia*, IES/CL, 1775/01/3.2, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1968, pp. 1-8; Markakis and Nega, p. 141.

¹²³Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär: Wuldät...*, p.144.

In its first proclamation [Proclamation No. 1/1974], issued on 12 September 1974, the *Därg* announced the deposition of the emperor, the suspension of the 1955 constitution, the designation of the Crown Prince as successor to the throne, the establishment of a Provisional Military Government, the ban on all civil liberties including the right to strike and stage demonstrations.¹²⁴ Among the provisions of the proclamation, the ban on civil liberties restricted the workers' right to strike and to form unions. It was against the workers and their confederation. Article 8 of the proclamation, for instance, stated that "... it is hereby prohibited, for the duration of this proclamation, to conspire against the motto 'Ethiopia First; to engage in any strike, hold unauthorized demonstration or assembly or engage in any act that may disturb public peace and security.'" Article 9 of the same proclamation also stated that "...a military court shall be established to try those who transgress the provision stated in article 8."¹²⁵ Moreover, at the same time as the General Council of CELU held its meeting, the PMAC issued another proclamation [Proclamation No.2 of 1974] on September 15 and reaffirmed its power both as head of the government and head of the state until a permanent government was established as it was indicated in article 6 of Proclamation No. 1 of September 12, 1974.¹²⁶

These proclamations were opposed not only by CELU but also students, high school teachers, a university teachers' group known as forum, the clandestine leftist organizations which were best known by their influential underground papers, *Democracia* and *Yäsäfiw Hezeb Demş* [*the Voice of the Masses*] and sections of the military such as the Engineers Corps, the Body Guard and the Army Aviation.¹²⁷

¹²⁴*Nägarit Gazèta*, No. 1, Proclamation No.1 of 1974, September 12, 1974.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶*Nägarit Gazèta*, Proclamation No. 2, 1974, September 15, 1974.

¹²⁷Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*..., pp. 236-237.

Regardless of the response of the PMAC, the General Council of CELU met from 15 to 16 September and passed a resolution on the country's situation. Even though the civilian left and CELU had approved the overthrow of the old regime and other activities of the *Därg* from June 22 to September 12, they opposed outright the *Därg's* simultaneous ban on all strikes, unauthorized demonstrations and public meetings. Above all, they wanted to be part of the new government and share state power. In its resolution, CELU demanded the dissolution of the *Därg* and the establishment in its place of a 'Provisional People's Government' and the reinstatement of the fundamental civil rights suspended by the *Därg*. Moreover, it stressed that the change was not only the work of the military; rather it was the outcome of years of struggle of workers, students, teachers and other concerned Ethiopians. Thus, it demanded the reinstatement of all the democratic rights which were banned by the *Därg* and the postponement of Development through Cooperation Campaign Program commonly referred to as *Zämäča* until political power was transferred to civilians. CELU also condemned the draft constitution and the appointment of *Märed Azmač* Asefawossän as Crown Prince and head of the state.¹²⁸

Regarding the establishment of a 'Provisional Peoples' Government', the General Council of CELU argued that government should be composed of representatives of the Ethiopian Labour Unions, the committee that were formed in the various provinces during the February popular movement, the armed forces, the Ethiopian Teachers' Association, the University Teachers' Union and University Teachers' Forum, the Civil Servants Association, the Ethiopian Students Union, the Ethiopian Businessmen's Association and the Ethiopian Women's Association, etc. The resolution also demanded a new constitution guaranteeing the right to assembly, speech, press, peaceful demonstration, and including the right to form political parties. Moreover, it

¹²⁸Markakis and Nega, p. 142; Lefort, p. 71.

called for the postponement of the program called Development through Cooperation Campaign until a provisional people's government was formed. If the *Därg* failed to implement these demands, CELU threatened to call a general strike to be held on 25 September 1974.¹²⁹

The resolution of CELU was drafted by Geremačäw Lämmä, a member of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP) who had infiltrated the confederation and had been assigned to work in the Education Department on 11 September 1974.¹³⁰ Hence, one can argue that the core ideas of the resolution emanated from the EPRP. Interestingly enough, for instance, the resolution was virtually similar with the announcement made by the EPRP through *Democracia* a day before the General Council of CELU held its meeting. It stated that "... ከሌሎች የኅብረተሰቡ አካሎችና ማኅበሮች ጋር በመተባበር ሕዝባዊ የሆኑ ጥያቄዎችን ማንሳትና እሱንም በቀጥታ የሚመለከቱት መሆናቸውን ማወቅ እንዳለበት በዚህ ረገድ አሁን መነሳት ያለባቸው ጥያቄዎች፡- የዘውዱ ጨርሶ መውደም፤ ሙሉ ዲሞክራሲያዊ መብቶች/ የመናገር የመጻፍ የመሰብሰብ ማህበር የማቆም/፤ ጊዜያዊ ከሕዝብ የተውጣጣ መንግስት ማቆም፤ የወታደራዊ አገዛዝ ላይ ገደብ መፈለግ።"¹³¹ In addition, on 18 September 1974, after the General Council of CELU disseminated its resolution, the EPRP lauded it as a timely one and expressed its support to the confederation.¹³²

The resolution of CELU was rejected by the *Därg* as an anti-revolutionary step taken by the remnants of the old regime and operatives of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The *Därg* further stressed that the leaders of CELU should retract the resolution and announce this to their

¹²⁹IES/CL, 2390/01/64, CELU's Resolution against the Military takeover Power in Ethiopia in *Mäsekäräm* 6, 1967 EC (16 September 1974), Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy...*, p.148; Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 45; Andaregachew Tiruneh, p.73; Markakis and Nega, p. 141.

¹³⁰Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy...*, pp. 48 & 271.

¹³¹"...CELU has to raise questions of the people in collaboration with other organizations and it should know that it is its primary concern. At the moment, questions that should be raised are: the total dissolution of the Crown, the respect of all democratic rights/ the right of speech, writing, assembly, and to form association, establishment of Provisional Peoples Government and the limit of the power of the military regime." See also IES/CL, 1775/01/1.9, *Democracia*, No. 9, *Mäskäräm* 4, 1967 (14 September 1974).

¹³²IES/CL, 1775/01/1.10, *Democracia*, No. 10, *Mäskäräm* 8, 1967 (18 September 1974)

members or face closure. Not intimidated, the leaders refused to retract on the ground that they could not do that because it was the responsibility of the General Council and simply agreed to call the General Council on 19 September for the *Därg* members to present their demand. Thus, the General Council was called and a similar stern warning was given by Major Endalä Tässäma, a member of the *Därg*, and the meeting ended without agreement.¹³³

Nevertheless, members of the General Council met on 23 September to arrive at a conclusive decision. Before the meeting was started, however, Major Däbäla Dinsa and a gun slinging lieutenant came and took the confederation's President, Beyene Solomon, Vice-President Gedäy Gäbrè and Secretary General Fesseha Şeyon Täkiè and put them behind bars in the Fourth Army Division headquarters. Even though the top leaders were detained, the meeting was conducted under the leadership of another Vice President, Aläm Abdi, and decided to undertake a general strike on 25 September 1974.¹³⁴ After arresting the leaders of CELU, the *Därg* began to control CELU by convincing Aläm Abdi to call off the general strike without the knowledge of the General Council. Aläm, who was ambitious, was persuaded by what the *Därg* promised to him to write a circular letter to a number of local unions announcing the postponement of the general strike for an indefinite period, which was totally against the spirit of the previous resolution. Consequently, some local unions stopped their work while others went to work. A general confusion was created amongst the local unions and the general strike failed to materialize. Following this, some local unions' leaders began to oppose Aläm strongly. This marked the beginning of a serious antagonistic relationship between the civilian left, particularly, the

¹³³Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy...*, p. 151.

¹³⁴Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire...*, p. 59; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Ityopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär: Wuldät...*, pp. 50-51; Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy...*, pp. 151-153.

supporters and members of EPRP, and the *Därg* over control of the revolutionary state in which CELU became a battleground.¹³⁵

Except some attempts made by the employees of Ethiopian Air Lines and Commercial Bank, the general strike failed to materialize because of the *Därg's* stern warning and lack of coordination among the remaining leaders of the confederation. On the other hand, Beyene Solomon argues that the general strike was intentionally aborted by the Vice-President, Alām Abdi, who had already started contact with the PMAC and aspired to be President of CELU. He added that the vice president wrote a letter that expressed the adjournment of the general strike for an indefinite period and confused many workers of several plants.¹³⁶ This aborted general strike marked the beginning of the direct intervention of the PMAC in CELU affairs. The PMAC approached the vice president to break any opposition that would possibly be formed inside CELU. On top of this, it also continued to disparage the former leaders of CELU and other progressive white collar workers who opposed Alām Abdi as agent of imperialism. This created a rift between the vice president and the radical white collar workers who were against both the military takeover of power and the remnants of the former leaders of the confederation. The radical white collar workers were also eventually supported by the newly emerging civilian leftist organizations, especially the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP). From then on, CELU continued to be plagued by internal division and external intervention by the PMAC and EPRP.¹³⁷

¹³⁵IES/CL, 2390/01/65, CELU's Resolution passed on *Mäsekäräm* 13, 1967 (23 September 1974) and threatened the *Därg* with a general strike to be held in *Mäsekäräm* 15, 1967 EC (25 September 1974); Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*, pp. 127-131

¹³⁶Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy...*, p. 153.

¹³⁷Andargachew Aseged, *Baṣer Yätäqāṣa Räjem Guzo: Mäison Bä İteyopiya Hezeboç Tegel Wusṭ* (Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1993), p. 259.

Besides the military, CELU was influenced by the clandestine political organizations which had their origins outside Ethiopia before 1974. The two most important civilian leftist organizations were the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM). The leadership of the former returned to Ethiopia in July 1974. The party announced its presence by circulating its weekly clandestine paper, *Democracia* in the same month. Even though the leadership of the latter did not return to Ethiopia until the beginning of 1975, it managed to circulate its underground weekly paper (*Voice of the Masses*) since August 1974. From then on, the two civilian leftist organizations began to consider themselves as champions to address the causes of the early 1974 popular uprising and stood against the military.¹³⁸ Even though both parties expressed their solidarity with the working class as Marxist Leninists and wrote a number of articles that reflected the conditions of workers in their weekly clandestine papers, it was apparently the EPRP that managed to infiltrate CELU to a higher degree and tried to use the potential of the confederation in its struggle against the *Därg*.

It was at the beginning of September 1974 that EPRP began to infiltrate CELU and establish its cell inside the confederation and in various plants. Kiflu Tadesse, Geremačäw Lämman, Tädlä Fantayä and Seyoum Kābādä were the first EPRP members who infiltrated CELU in September 1974 and began to establish EPRP cells inside the confederation and its affiliates. The first strong cell was established in the Märkato area among the Retailer Workers' Union under the leadership of Samuel Alāmayāhu, who later became one of the most important members of the Central Committee (CC) of EPRP.¹³⁹ Besides its clandestine weekly paper, EPRP used the confederation as a good avenue to express its resentment of and opposition to the *Därg*. For instance, even

¹³⁸ Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 75.

¹³⁹ Informants: Kiflu Tadesse, 14 November 2014, Amsterdam; Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam, 12 February 2015, Addis Ababa; Abära Abäbä, 10 May 2015, Addis Ababa.

though EPRP continued to demand the establishment of a "Provisional Peoples' Government" through its clandestine leaflets since July 1974,¹⁴⁰ it was apparently after CELU included it in its resolution of 16 September 1974 that the question of such a government was highly popularized and reached the popular masses. Thus, one can argue that the demand for "Provisional Peoples' Government" in the resolution of CELU can be seen as a clear manifestation of the infiltration of the EPRP into CELU.¹⁴¹ In fact, the idea of Peoples' Government was voiced for the first time in the country's history by the civilian left during the establishment of Endalkačaw cabinet but it began to be more widely disseminated after the *Därg* came to power by the same group.¹⁴²

The *Därg's* repression of CELU and the infiltration of the civilian leftist parties further divided and weakened the confederation. Be that as it may, CELU was also suspected of infiltration by Eritrean insurgents. Although the *Därg* could not confirm that the three leaders under arrest were Eritrean nationalists, their arrest reflected the increasing tendency of the military to view Eritreans who were members of the confederation as Eritrean insurgents. The growth of the Eritrean nationalists' activity in the early 1970s at the same time increased the *Därg's* suspicion over Eritreans.¹⁴³ In general, from September 1974 to September 1975, the civilian leftist parties allied with the white collar workers to seize control of CELU and use it as a base for resistance against the *Därg*. From September 1975 through early 1977, however, the *Därg* succeeded in subordinating workers' organizations to its ideal of reconstructing a nationalist/socialist state. Thus, CELU became one of the principal battlegrounds in the struggle for control of the revolutionary state. This struggle was waged between the two major petty bourgeoisie political

¹⁴⁰IES/CL, 1775/01/1.1, *Democracia*, No. 1, Apparently *Hämlè* 11, 1966 EC (18 July 1974)

¹⁴¹Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*, p.134.

¹⁴²IES/CL, 2400/01/1, A Paper written by Anonymous Writer against the Coming to Power of Endalkačaw Mäkonän in *Yekatit* 21, 1966EC (28 March 1974).

¹⁴³Killion, p. 559.

groupings: the civilian left (students, teachers, white collars, state employees) and the military left.¹⁴⁴ The ideological conflict between the two leftist groups affected individual members of CELU and further aggravated personal rivalries that had already existed in the confederation. By 1975 tension within the leadership of CELU became severe and disrupted the function of the confederation. Successive meetings of the General Council ended without any result.¹⁴⁵

Following the imprisonment of the three leaders of CELU, the General Council was divided between two rival factions to seize control of the confederation. The first group was led by the former vice-president, Alām Abdi, who had allied with the *Därg* to keep CELU's historical subordination to the state. Alām was also supported by a few unions outside the capital, including Wonji-Šäwa sugar estate and factory and the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Workers Unions. Alām tried to consolidate his power by using the support he got from the *Därg* and the aforementioned unions. In Addis Ababa, however, the majority of local unions led by the radical white collar workers and the EPRP members who had infiltrated it and attempted to seize control of CELU from the remnant leaders of CELU opposed Alām and the *Därg*. These local unions were also supported by employees of the public sector. In early January, for instance, the leaders of 80 radical local unions in Addis Ababa formed a committee of 15 members led by Marqos Hägos, the leader of the Pan Africa Insurance Workers Union and sympathizer of the EPRP, and began to challenge Alām for the confederations' leadership. Similarly, a committee with 13 trade union members was also organized in Eritrea. The two committees requested Alām Abdi to call the General Congress, but he refused to do that by providing several pretexts. It was a tactic to consolidate his power by postponing CELU's regular meetings. With the intervention of

¹⁴⁴*Ibid*, pp. 546-47.

¹⁴⁵Ajitu Megersa, "The History of Ethiopian Working Class Struggle and its Aftermath," BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of Political Science and International Relations, 1984, p. 31.

representatives of the *Därg* in the MNCD, he agreed to call the General Congress on 2 February 1975. But, it was postponed again indefinitely.¹⁴⁶ Even though the General Congress was later called to meet from 1 to 2 March 1975 at the request of the radical white collar workers, it failed to materialize because of the conspiracy by Aläm and the *Därg*.¹⁴⁷

Consequently, the majority of the leaders of local unions which affiliated with CELU accused Aläm Abdi of sabotage and malpractice and demanded his immediate removal. They argued that Aläm deliberately hindered the union representatives' meeting from taking place knowing very well that he would be ousted by a unanimous vote. They also accused him of informing unions' representatives in Asmāra not to come to attend the meeting which was planned to be held in the headquarters of CELU and also for instructing enterprise owners in Asmara not to give permission for the unions' representatives to travel. However, unions' representatives in Addis Ababa met inside the headquarters on 2 February 1975 and called on him to resign from his post. Even though he tried hard to prevent the meeting and made a futile attempt to disband the representatives by flatly refusing them the facilities of the gathering hall of CELU, the meeting was held in his absence and condemned him for all problems created in the confederation. Not only unions' representatives but also the workers serving at the headquarters of CELU themselves submitted written complaints against him for corruption and blocking the aforesaid representatives meeting.¹⁴⁸

Annoyed by the conspiracy of Aläm Abdi with the *Därg* officials, the committee established by the unions' representatives of Addis Ababa met on 19 April 1975 and demanded the removal of

¹⁴⁶IES/CL, 1775/01/1.24, *Democracia*, *Ṭer* 25, 1967 EC (29 January 1975)

¹⁴⁷Andargachew Aseged, p. 259.

¹⁴⁸Ethiopian Herald, 6 February, 1975 (*Ṭer* 29, 1967 EC).

Alām Abdi from CELU. The officials in the MNCD, however, rejected the demand and continued to support the remnants of the old leadership. Consequently, the committee met on 1 May 1975 and decided to remove Alām Abdi from CELU as of 26 May 1975. In its resolution, the committee also ordered all workers in the headquarters of CELU not to accept any instructions from Alām Abdi anymore.¹⁴⁹ In the meantime, the committee held another meeting in CELU's headquarters from 16 to 18 May 1975 and invited him to chair it but he refused on the ground that the meeting was illegal. It was at this time that they physically removed him from his office and locked him in the photocopy room. He was released after the commander of the Fifth Police Station agreed to bail him out. Immediately after he was released, Alām informed the *Därg* about the situation. Consequently, some *Därg* members, Major Endalä Täsäma, Täka Tulu, Däbälla Dinsa and Dämessè Däressa, intervened and disbanded the meeting after fierce confrontation with the workers.¹⁵⁰

The struggle between the radical white collar workers and Alām Abdi to control CELU was, in fact, aggravated by the struggle between EPRP and *Därg* who also struggled to control the confederation. Following the decision of the committee to remove Alām Abdi, the military realized that CELU was slipping out of its control and began to be dominated by EPRP members and supporters. Thus, on 19 May 1975, it closed the headquarters of CELU until a provisional committee was legally elected to lead the confederation. In its announcement, however, the military allowed local unions to continue their activities. It also promised that CELU would be reopened after the workers legally elected new representatives. On the other hand, it also tried to infiltrate both the confederation and local unions with its own agents in order to divide and

¹⁴⁹Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär, “Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Enqeseqasè..., pp. 107-108.

¹⁵⁰Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär: Wuldät ...*, pp. 197-198; Markakis and Nega, p. 173.

weaken the labour movement. The *Därg* also began to regard strikes and demonstrations as insurrections and treat them severely.¹⁵¹

The closure of the headquarters of CELU was, however, violently protested by members of local trade unions, students, teachers and other civilian leftist groups. Since the *Därg* feared the strong relationship that CELU had already established with the other civilian radicals and the possible opposition which would come from these groups, CELU was allowed to function under the leadership of a provisionally elected committee after almost ten days of closure. Thus, Berhanu Bayeh, a *Därg* member and chairman of the legal affairs committee, called around 300 labour leaders who represented 265 local unions to the palace on 31 May 1975; these elected around 65 committee members who would manage the confederation and facilitate the election of “true labour leaders” who will lead workers in line with the aims and objectives of Ethiopian socialism. On the same day, the confederation was reopened and the responsibility of handling the confederation was given to the newly elected committee of five members, Marqos Hägos, Tädla Fantayä, Šumeyè Täfära, Ebrahim Ahmäd and Mäsfen Abräha. Thereafter, CELU was reopened and the General Congress of CELU continued its meeting in its head quarters for the next four days from June 1 to 4 and elected the provisional leaders of CELU. Though the *Därg* tried to get its favorites elected, the radical white collar workers who dominated the meeting elected Marqos Hägos, the chairman of the Pan African Insurance Company Union and a sympathizer of EPRP, as president, Mäsfen Abräha, the Chairman of Saba Bottle and Glass

¹⁵¹Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär, “Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Enqeseqasè...,” p. 109; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär: Wuldät...*, pp, 199-200.

Factory Workers' Union, as vice president, and Tässäma Därèssa from Awaš Valley Project Workers' Union as Secretary General. In addition, 10 other members were elected.¹⁵²

As a result of the infiltration of strong EPRP sympathizers into the provisional leadership, CELU launched an opposition campaign against the *Därg* within weeks. The EPRP used one of its sympathizer, Marqos Hägos, the chairman of the provisional leadership of the confederation, to pass a new resolution against the *Därg*. Thus, the provisional leadership led by Marqos Hägos met from June 1 to 4 June 1975 and passed a resolution of 14 points that condemned the interference of the *Därg* in the internal affairs of the confederation and the closure of CELU, and demanded the promulgation of a new labour law, introduction of minimum wage, social security, and salary increment, pension, severance pay, insurance, women's right, labour foreign relations. In addition, the resolution demanded the removal of what the *Därg* called የ ለውጥ ህዋሪያት (apostles of change) from ministries and other government agencies. The provisional leadership also warned the *Därg* that unless their 14 demands were appropriately addressed and if the government tried to intimidate workers as a result of the resolution they would call a general strike on 12 September 1975.¹⁵³

Regarding the infiltration of EPRP into CELU, Christopher Clapham argued that EPRP, which considered itself as the vanguard party of the working class, had strong links with CELU. More importantly, after the *Därg*'s takeover of power on 12 September 1974, EPRP called for the immediate establishment of a civilian government and this was subsequently echoed by CELU. Afterwards, the demands of EPRP and CELU became virtually identical and the number of

¹⁵²Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebar: Wuldät...*, pp. 199- 200; *Goh*, Vol.1, No. 8, *Hämlè* 1975EC, pp.16-21.

¹⁵³IES/CL, 2390/01/68, A Resolution passed by the Provisional Leaders of CELU in *Genbot* 26, 1967 EC (3 June 1975).

EPRP sympathizers inside the confederation grew considerably.¹⁵⁴ Though the role of the committee was unknown, the EPRP also managed to establish a Mixed Committee comprised of the top leaders of CELU and the Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA) on 17 June 1975.¹⁵⁵ It was apparently established to solidify the civilian leftist struggle against the military.

As soon as the resolution of the General Congress of CELU reached to the *Därg*, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, Lieutenant Colonel Atnafu Abate, and other two senior *Därg* officials went to the headquarters of CELU on 6 May 1975 and tried to convince the provisional leadership of CELU that the government was ready to solve the demands of workers after they had organized the state along the socialist model. Though they failed to reach a consensus, the officials advised the provisional leadership of the confederation to call off the general strike planned for 2 September 1975. Despite intimidation by the *Därg* officials, however, the provisional leadership, supported by the white collar radicals and their EPRP allies, continued to challenge openly the *Därg* for control of the state. On the first anniversary of Emperor Haile Selassie I's deposition, CELU members once again demonstrated in favor of popular democracy and against the *Därg*.¹⁵⁶ In addition, the provisional leadership called a special and urgent General Congress meeting to be held in the headquarters of CELU from 18 to 21 September 1975. After the meeting, the leadership of CELU and members of the congress passed a resolution that condemned the political reform introduced by the *Därg*. The resolution also called for the transfer of power from the military to the civilians with the recognition of all democratic rights such as freedom of speech, of the press, the right to organize, to assemble, to strike and to

¹⁵⁴Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 54-55.

¹⁵⁵IES/CL, 2390/01/69, A Letter written from the Mixed Committee to the *Därg* in *Sänè* 10, 1966EC (17 June 1975)

¹⁵⁶Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Tarik," *Kefel* 2, 1976 EC (1984), p. 16; Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy*..., p. 165.

demonstrate. It also accused the *Därg* of hijacking the revolution from the toiling masses and hindering the development of the country. The resolution incorporated all the major demands that had been demanded by CELU since the first general strike. Finally, the resolution warned that if the government failed to provide appropriate response and tried to intimidate workers as a result of this resolution, CELU would immediately call a general strike.¹⁵⁷

Local union leaders tried to distribute the resolution among members and to agitate them for a general strike. On 25 September 1975, the secretary of the Ethiopian Airline Workers' Union was apprehended by the security personnel while distributing the resolution to member workers at the airport. Consequently, serious confrontations broke out between the workers and the security personnel and seven workers were killed and dozens were wounded in the clash, and many others were thrown into jail. The provisional leaders of CELU responded by calling a general strike on 28 September 1975, but this failed to materialize as many active members had already gone underground before they organized the strike. Even though some local unions struck at plant level, the strike could not expand to other plants because of the stern measure taken by the government. Though it failed, the attempted general strike had the support of the EPRP and other civilian leftists. Frustrated by the demonstrations conducted here and there, however, the government issued a statement against the provisional leadership on 30 September 1975. On the same day, the government proclaimed a state of emergency in Addis Ababa and launched indiscriminate arrests launched in every enterprise. A number of labour leaders, including the

¹⁵⁷Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Tarik.....," *Kefel* 2, 1976 EC (1984), p. 25.

provisional leaders of the confederation and other active local union leaders were arrested.¹⁵⁸ Thus, one can argue that September 1975 marked the demise of CELU as a confederation.

In the meantime, however, the government continued to issue statements to intimidate the provisional leadership of the confederation. For instance, it issued a statement entitled: "አብዮታችን ሥራ በማቆም አድማ አይቀለበስም!" ("Our revolution will not be deterred by strikes"). Similar statements that demonized revolutionary workers continued to be disseminated through various media outlets. The government also tried to use divide and rule tactics to divide the workers though that was not as easy as they had expected. After realizing that all those measures could not bring change, the government tried to appease the workers by promulgating a new labour law, Proclamation No. 64/1975, on 6 December 1975.¹⁵⁹ Most of the workers, however, rejected the new labour law and the call for the reorganization of unions according to the law. Moreover, they continued demanding the release of their leaders. Likewise, EPRP rejected the new law as "code of slavery". It also noted that the new labour law failed to protect workers' right to strike, minimum wage and health insurance.¹⁶⁰ It further asserted that in proclaiming the new labour law, the *Därg* mainly aimed at pretending to the workers that it had responded to the demands of workers and thereby tried to cover the inhuman measures it had taken against workers, and to give legitimacy to the AETU.¹⁶¹ Regardless of its political aims, the new labour law improved workers' right to form associations by reducing the number of workers eligible to form a union from fifty to twenty.

¹⁵⁸Markakis and Nega , p. 174.

¹⁵⁹*Nägarit Gazeta*, Proclamation No. 64/1975, 6 December 1975.

¹⁶⁰IES/CL, 1775/02/22, *Labader*, No. 20, *Tahesas* 10, 1968 EC (20 December 1975); IES/CL, 1775/02/3, *Labadär*, Special Issue 2, February 1976.

¹⁶¹IES/CL, 2393/04/2/2.1, *Abyot*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 30 January, 1976, p. 3.

After the failure of the attempted general strike, the leaders of CELU were arrested and most of the leaders of local unions in Addis Ababa went underground. As a result, CELU became a defunct organization. With the promulgation of the new labour law on 6 December 1975, CELU was dissolved and ceased to exist. Nevertheless, some of the former leaders of CELU and radical leaders of local unions who had escaped jail went underground and continued to oppose the reorganization of unions according to the new law. They also put pressure on the government to set free labour leaders who were kept in prison. As a result, several labour leaders, including Marqos Hägos, were released on 20 March 1976.¹⁶² But, Lieutenant Colonel Fesseha Dästa, one of the top leaders of the military regime, argued in his memoirs that the labour leaders were arrested to buy time until the government promulgated the new labour law. He further argued that once the law was proclaimed, the government had no reason to keep them in prison. Thus, the release of labour leaders from prison was preplanned, and not in response to the pressure of EPRP.¹⁶³ The labour leaders who came out of prison were not allowed to work independently. As a result, they went underground in May 1976 and many of them were eventually killed suspected of being members of the EPRP between late 1976 and early 1977. For instance, Marqos Hägos was killed on 26 March 1977 in a gun battle with the security forces.¹⁶⁴

After the promulgation of the new labour law and the dissolution of CELU, the government began to engage in reorganizing trade unions at plant level. Those unions which were organized in similar industries came together and formed nine different federations of industrial unions which together resulted in the birth of a new national trade union that replaced CELU, the All

¹⁶²IES/CL, 1775/02/4, *Labader*, Special Issue, 3, Probably March 1976; IES/CL, 2393/04/2/2.2, *Abyot*, Vol. 1 No. 3, February-March, 1976

¹⁶³Fesseha Dästa, *Abyotu ena Tezeta* (Los Angeles: Tsehay Publishers, 2008), p. 184.

¹⁶⁴Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy*..., p. 167.

Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU), on 8 January 1977.¹⁶⁵ The reorganization of labour was mainly undertaken by the Provisional Office for Mass Organizations Affairs (POMOA) which was created by the *Därg* on 20 April 1976 to control the activities of the various mass organizations, including labour. From February 1976 to January 1977, the POMOA took full responsibility in organizing and controlling labour on behalf of the military regime.¹⁶⁶ It consisted of fifteen members drawn mainly from leftist parties and civilians. Almost half of them were members or sympathizers of AESM. They organized themselves into four permanent subcommittees in the areas of philosophy dissemination and information, political education, current affairs, and organization affairs, including labour.¹⁶⁷

One can also argue that the influence of AESM on the labour movement became conspicuous after the establishment of the POMOA which was dominated by its prominent members. It continued to influence labour until the end of 1977.¹⁶⁸ In fact, though it was not as strong as the EPRP, AESM had strong connection with trade unions outside Addis Ababa even before the establishment of POMOA. For instance, it had a strong cell in the Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union under the leadership of Milkiso Olanjo.¹⁶⁹

In general, throughout 1975 and 1976, CELU had been influenced by many civilian radical groups as well as the military which controlled power. It became a battle ground during the protracted conflict between the civilian leftist groups and the military to get control of state power. The infiltration of military agents and members of the student based parties into CELU

¹⁶⁵Christopher Clapham, *Transformation...*, p. 55.

¹⁶⁶Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation Part II...*, p. 24.

¹⁶⁷Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 162.

¹⁶⁸Andargachew Aseged, pp. 296-297.

¹⁶⁹Informants: Gäbrä Selasè Gäbrä Mariam, Šemäles Täklè and Aräga Emešaw

hindered the confederation from playing a leading role during the revolution and benefit from it. On the contrary, the revolution aggravated CELU's internal power struggle and resulted in its demise. The military which controlled power replaced the confederation with a highly controlled hierarchical national trade union, the All Ethiopian Trade unions (AETU), on 7 January 1977.

3.4. The Birth of an Underground Trade Union: The Ethiopian Workers Revolutionary Unions (EWRU)

Even though the General Congress of CELU held its meeting from 18 to 21 September 1975 and decided to undertake a general strike, this failed to materialize because of the stern measure taken by the *Därg* against the provisional leadership of CELU and the leaders of its local affiliates. As a result, a number of active labour leaders from both the confederation and local unions were thrown into jail. In the meantime, however, some labour leaders who had escaped imprisonment came together and began an underground movement. At the beginning, they established a committee called "የትንሳኤ ኮሚቴ" ("resurrection committee") to call another general strike and to continue the labour struggle. According to Kiflu Tadesse, the resurrection committee constituted mainly the strike committee formerly established in Gulälè and Märkato areas to organize the aborted strike. The first members of the committee were: Yeräfu Bädanè, President of the Glass Factory Workers' Union in Gulälè, Abbas Bälay, President of the Märkato area Tailors' Union, Gänät Taräqāñ, President of the Lägässä Fälākä Transportation Workers' Union, and Kiflu Tadesse, a member of the EPRP's leadership of the workers' committee consisting of Germačāw Lämma, Zäru Kehšen, Alāmayāhu Ṭelahun and Kiflu Tadesse. It tried to create awareness among active workers who were in disarray regarding the nature of an underground struggle and how to sustain the momentum of the struggle illegally. It also tried to

help the arrested leaders and their families. This activity encouraged a number of workers to join the underground struggle and a new resurrection committee was established to widen the front of the struggle. The second committee consisted of Tässäma Därèssa, the secretary of the provisional leadership of CELU, Täšagär Berhänè, a member of the Ethiopian Commercial Bank Workers' Union, Hailè Abbay, a member of the Ethiopian Telecommunication Workers' Union, and others.¹⁷⁰

While the resurrection committee was working with the EPRP workers' committee to call another general strike, the government proclaimed a new labour law, Proclamation No. 64/1975 on 6 December 1975. It was issued to appease the workers who were agitating clandestinely to undertake a general strike. Even though the new labour law seemed progressive with regard to the formation of unions, it could not resolve the antagonistic relation between workers and the military government. Radical worker activists together with infiltrated EPRP members continued to attack the new labour law. They regarded it as "a code of slavery" that denied workers the right to strike, minimum wage and health insurance.¹⁷¹

Despite expressing its opposition to the *Därg*, the resurrection committee was unable to organize a general strike between September and December 1975. Thus, the committee abandoned its plan to call for a general strike and engaged in transforming itself into an underground labour organization to maintain the momentum of the working class struggle. Thus, the Ethiopian Workers Revolutionary Unions (EWRU) was formed by members of the resurrection committee in December 1975. During the formation of the organization, the committee outlined its short

¹⁷⁰Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: Part II...*, pp.18-19; Kiflu Tadesse, *Ya Tewuled: Yäläwuṣ Maebäl bä Iteyopia, Vol. II* (Addis Ababa, 1991), pp.77-78.

¹⁷¹IES/CL, 1775/02/22, *Labader*, No. 20, *Tahasas* 10, 1968 EC (20 December 1975); IES/CL, 1775/02/3, *Labadär*, Special Issue 2, February 1976; IES/CL, 1775/02/2, *Lab Adär*, *Miyazeya* 23, 1968 EC (1 May 1976).

and long term objectives. After three months, the General Congress comprised of 27 workers held its first meeting around Qābāna River in the house of Daro Nāgaš, a member of EPRP and the president of Berhan ena Sālam Printing Press Workers' Union. The congress ratified the constitution of EWRU and its program. It also created the organization's symbol and clandestine paper, "የኢ.ሊ.አ.ማ ድምፅ" (*Voice of the EWRU*). At the end, the congress elected the leadership of the organization comprised of nine members and a secretary.¹⁷² The leadership was, however, very nominal and the organization was mainly led by Kiflu Tadesse and other EPRP labour committee members.¹⁷³ According to Kiflu, at the beginning, the Politburo of EPRP rejected the proposal of forming an underground labour organization. But, after the EPRP labour committee studied and presented a comprehensive proposal regarding the importance of an underground labour organization to defend the interests of workers, the Politburo recognized the establishment of EWRU.¹⁷⁴

In the short term, EWRU mainly focused on struggling for the release of labour leaders who were arrested in September 1975 and providing assistance to their families. In the long term, however, EWRU aimed at struggling for the protection of democratic rights, the making of an independent CELU, the dissolution of proclamation 64/1975 ("code of slavery") and the promulgation of a comprehensive labour law, the formation of free farmer, youth and women's associations, and the protection of all workers' interests by arming radical members.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷²Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: Part II...*, p. 23.

¹⁷³Informant: Kiflu Tadesse, 14 November 2014, Amsterdam.

¹⁷⁴Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: Part II...*, pp. 20-21; Informant: Kiflu Tadesse, 14 November 2014, Amsterdam.

¹⁷⁵IES/CL, 1775/03/2/1.1, *Voice of EWRU*, Vol. 1, No. 1, *Sänè* 14, 1968 EC (21 June 1976); Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: Part II...*, p. 22.

EWRU was not a replacement of CELU or one which was set up concurrently to CELU. It was rather an organization that carried on the struggle of CELU clandestinely when the legal struggle of workers was not possible. It was a union that struggled to have CELU firmly set up and to do away with the military that challenged the legal existence of CELU. It was organized to defend CELU and make it independent. In its clandestine paper, *Voice of EWRU*, for instance, the organization described the importance of an underground labour organization to defend the interest of workers when the legal means ceased to be available. It asserted that:

...የኢትዮጵያ ላብአደር በራሱ የትግል ልምድ የወታደራዊውን መንግስት እውነተኛ ባህሪ ለአንዴም ለሁሌም እንዲገነዘብ ከማድረጉም በላይ የወደፊቱ ትግላችን በዋነኛውና በአመዛኝ ሃይሉ ህገወጥ መሆን እንደሚገባው አመለካከትን። ይህም ብቻ አይደለም። ህገወጥ የሆነውን የሰው ትግል ለማቀነባበርና ለመምራት ህገወጥ የላብ አደር ድርጅት እንደሚያስፈልግ ጭምር አስተማረን። ካሁን በፊት እንዳልነው 'በቦምብ የተጎሳቆለ ወታደር መከላከያ ምሽግ እንደሚሰራ ሁሉ ላብ አደሩም ከፋሽስታዊ ናዳ ለመዳን እና ዳግም ለመነሳት የሰው ድርጅት ምሽግ አስፈለገው።' የኢትዮጵያ ላብ አደር አብዮታዊ ማህበር (ኢ. ላ. አ.ማ) የተፀነሰው በዚህ ሁኔታ እና ጊዜ ውስጥ ነው።¹⁷⁶

Besides giving a clear understanding of the true behavior of the military regime, the combating experience of the Ethiopian proletariats indicated that our struggle in the future should have to be dominantly underground. It also taught us the need for an illegal underground labour organization so as to coordinate and led the illegal struggle. As we have said before 'as a soldier wounded by hand grenade needs to dig a trench, the proletariats also need to make an underground organization to barricade themselves from the "Fascist" military regime's repression.' It was, thus, during such time and circumstance that the Ethiopian Workers Revolutionary Unions (EWRU) was conceived.

In one of its clandestine paper, *Labadär*, the EPRP also clearly put how and for what purpose the EWRU was formed. It asserted that workers had no option to defend their right after the aborted general strike of September 1975 except to organize them secretly and strengthen their underground organization. It stated that:

¹⁷⁶IES/CL, 1775/03/2/1.1; The *Voice of EWRU*, Vol. 1, No. 1, *Sänè* 14, 1968 EC (21 June 1976).

...የላብኦችን ቆራጥ የሥራ ማቆም አድማ በማስመልከት ቀድሞውንም ተገፊው የነበሩት ሰብአዊ መብቶቻችን በአስቸኳይ ጊዜ አዋጅ አፈር ሲለብሱ የነቁ ላብኦችን ያለፍርድ መታሰርና መረሸን በአየለቱ ቀጠለ። የኢ.ሰ.አ.ማና የሌሎችም ማህበሮች መሪዎች ሲታፈኑ የታጋይ ኃይሎች አሰሳና አፈና ዕለታዊ ክንውን ሆነ። ታሪካዊ ውሳኔዎች የተላለፉት ኢ.ሰ.አ.ማ የረከሱ ጆሮ ጠቢዎች መፈንጫ ሆነች። በአጭሩ ፀረ ላብኦች የሆነው ፋሽስታዊ ፅልመት የፖለቲካ ህይወታችንን ሸፈነው። በዚህ ዓይነት የታፈነው የኢትዮጵያ ላብኦች በህጋዊ መንገድ ለመታገል ያለው ዕድል ጨለማ ሲለብስ የተረፈው አማራጭ አንድ ብቻ ነበር። በህቡዕ/በስውር ተደራጅቶ መታገል! በዚህ ዓይነት ነው በፋሽስታዊው መንግስት የተዳፈነው የላብኦች ትግል ፍም ውስጥ ውስጡን እያፈገ መቀጣጠል የጀመረው። በዚህ ዓይነት ነው የላብኦች ስውር ትግል ሃይሉን እያሰባሰበና ጥረቱን እያቀናበረ የሄደው። በዚህ ዓይነት ነው የማህበር መሪዎቻችንን ለማስፈታትና ኢ.ሰ.አ.ማን ከፋሽስቶች መዳፍ ስር ለማውጣት የተደረገው ትግል የተፋፋመው።¹⁷⁷

...The extra judicial arrest and repression of conscious workers continued following the proletariats' determined general strike against the human rights that they had already been deprived of and now, due to the issuance of a state of emergency, the human rights which are being buried. The search for and apprehension of the combatant forces became a day to day practice following the imprisonment of the leaders of CELU and its affiliates. The confederation in which historical decisions had been passed is now becomes a playground for worthless sycophants. In short, the darkness of anti proletariat "Fascism" has covered our political life. The Ethiopian proletariats who are silenced by such circumstances have only one choice which is left when all the legal means of struggle covered with darkness- to organize and struggle clandestinely! It is in such a way that the flame of the proletariats' struggle which has been suppressed by the "Fascist" government begins to flare up. It was in such a way that the underground struggle of the proletariat coordinated its endeavor and power. It was in such a way that the struggle to set labour leaders and CELU free from the control of the "Fascist" military regime was ignited.

In another clandestine paper called *Abyot*, the EPRP further noted that the EWRU was formed illegally to defend the legally established CELU. It asserted that "...CELU is the legal, official instrument of the struggle of workers while EWRU is the illegal instrument of combat of workers."¹⁷⁸ Thus, one can argue that EWRU was an underground labour organization formed by EPRP, which called itself the vanguard of the working class, to control workers and form a socialist state.

¹⁷⁷IES/CL, 1775/02/3, *Labadär*, Special Issue 2, *Yekatit* 1968 EC (February 1976).

¹⁷⁸IES/CL, 2393/04/2/2.2, *Abyot*, Vol. 1, No. 3, February-March, 1976, p. 2.

Besides its short and long term programs of action, the EWRU accepted the program of EPRP and worked for its implementation. Like the EPRP, the EWRU attacked the new labour law, Proclamation 64/1975, and agitated workers to oppose it. It also incited workers in different plants to oppose the reorganization of unions and election of leaders in accordance with the new labour law until the earlier labour leaders were released. It organized workers in different plants and served as a center of resistance to the *Därg* regime. It also continued to voice all the previous demands of CELU, including the formation of a provisional popular government and the protection of all democratic rights.¹⁷⁹

After the release of labour leaders on 20 March 1976, however, EWRU changed its tactics and resumed the legal struggle against the military regime, but it still remained an illegal organization. It mobilized its members to participate in the election of the local unions and federations being organized. On the other hand, it demanded the revision of the new labour law and a free and fair election process. Supported by EPRP, EWRU tried to use both illegal and legal means to control the Ethiopian workers. One of the EPRP's clandestine papers, *Labadär* for instance, stated that:

...የኢኮኖሚና የፖለቲካ ትግላችንን ለማፋፋም የምንችለው ደግሞ ህጋዊና ህገወጥ ትግሎችን በማጣመር የተራመድን እንደሆነ ብቻ ነው። ህጋዊና ህገወጥ ትግሎችን ለማካሄድ የምንችለው ህጋዊና ህገወጥ ድርጅቶችን ስናጠናክር መሆኑ ግልፅ ነው። ኢ.ሰ.አ.ማ የላብአደሮች ህጋዊ መድረክ ሲሆን ኢ.ላ.አ.ማ ደግሞ ህገወጥ ድርጅቱ ነው። እነዚህ ሁለት የላብአደር ድርጅቶች የማይነጣጠሉ አንድ አካል አንድ አምሳል ናቸው። እኛ ላብአደሮች ህገወጥ ትግሎችን እርግፍ አድርገን ትተን በህጋዊ መንገድ ብቻ የምንታገል የቀኝ አድርባዮች ጠጋኞችና የደርግ የፖለቲካ ጭራዎች አይደሉም። በሌላ በኩል ደግሞ በህጋዊ የትግል ዘዴዎች ከመጠቀም ቸል የምንልና የምንበዝን የግራ አድርባዮችም አይደሉም። እኛ ላብአደሮች በህጋዊና ህገወጥ ድርጅቶች በመጠቀም ህጋዊና ህገወጥ ትግሎችን በማጣመር በተሟላ መንገድ እንታገላለን።¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ IES/CL, 2393/04/2/2.2, *Abyot*, Vol. 1, No. 3, February-March, 1976, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ IES/CL, 1775/02/4, *Labadär*, Special Issue 3, *Mägabit* 1968 EC (March 1976).

...It is only by coordinating the legal and illegal struggles that we can consolidate our economic and political struggles. It is also clear that we can carry out legal and illegal struggles only when we strengthen our legal and illegal organizations. CELU is the legal organization of workers while EWRU is their illegal organization. We, proletariats, are not rightist subservients, revisionists and propagandists of the politics of the Därg regime who dropped illegal tactics and struggle only with legal frontiers. On the other hand, we are not also leftist subservients who ignored to use legal ways for struggle. We, proletariats, struggle by using both legal and illegal organizations and coordinating both illegal and legal tactics.

It was after the promulgation of the new labour law that the military regime started to reorganize local unions at plant level in accordance with the law. According to Article 114 of Proclamation No 64/1975, local unions were allowed to organize, elect their leaders and be registered within 90 days effective from the day of the proclamation.¹⁸¹ The reorganization of local unions and the formation of industrial unions' federations were opposed by radical workers who joined the underground workers' organization, EWRU. They opposed the election process at plant level until the labour leaders were released from prison. Thus, the reorganization of local unions failed to be concluded as planned.¹⁸² The reorganization of local unions, however, began to show momentum after the release of labour leaders on 20 March 1976. Following this, EWRU began to change its tactics and participate in the legal struggle though it did not drop the illegal means of struggle. Despite its involvement in the reorganization of local unions, EWRU continued to demand that the military government stop its interference in the election process.¹⁸³

In addition, on 20 April 1976, the military government created a new agency called the Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs (POMOA) to organize the Ethiopian masses, including labour. It had a commission of 15 members coming from different political parties and

¹⁸¹ *Nägarit Gazèffa*, No. 11, Proclamation No.64/1975 6th December 1975.

¹⁸² IES/CL, 1775/02/3, *Labadär*, Special Issue 2, *Yekatit* 1968 EC (February 1976).

¹⁸³ IES/CL, 1775/02/4, *Labadär*, Special Issue 3, *Mägabiti* 1968 EC (March 1976).

civil organizations. But, it was dominated by members of the AESM. It played an important role in the reorganization of labour from 20 April 1976 to the formation of AETU on 8 January 1977.¹⁸⁴ Thus, one can argue that the establishment of POMOA contributed to the reorganization of labour. It also marked the beginning of the active involvement of the AESM in the working class movement. Moreover, trade unions came to be an important battle ground between AESM and the military government on the one hand and EPRP on the other hand.

On 1 May 1976, during the May Day celebration, a number of workers demonstrated against the government. They demanded for the revision of the labour law and the formation of an independent confederation. They also came out with a banner reading “EPRP is Our Party!” Consequently, the military regime resorted to violence and killed workers in Addis Ababa and in other parts of the country. Hundreds of workers and labour leaders were also arrested.¹⁸⁵ After this incident, the government continued to manipulate elections and appoint only its own supporters as leaders of the newly organized local unions and federations. For instance, around 300 leaders of factory unions held a meeting from 31 May to 3 June 1976 to organize their federation and elect its leaders. But, the government interrupted the meeting suspecting that the leadership would be taken by EPRP members. On top of this, the government arrested some labour leaders it suspected of being close to EPRP.¹⁸⁶

As a result of this repression, the provisional leaders who were released from prison and assigned to their former positions resorted to underground activity. For instance, it was following the May Day repression that Marqos Hägos joined the underground labour movement. The voice of the

¹⁸⁴ Andargachew Tiruneh, p.162; Kifilu Tadesse, *The Generation: Part II...*, p. 24.

¹⁸⁵ Kifilu Tadesse, *The Generation: Part II...*, p. 24.

¹⁸⁶ Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Tarik Kä...", p. 43.

EWRU clearly described how the military government restricted the legal means of struggle and how workers resorted once again to the illegal one. It stated that: "...በህጋዊ መንገድ ለመታገል ያለንን ዕድል ፋሽስቶች ሊገቱት ቢሞክሩም በስውር ድርጅታችን በኢ.ላ.አ.ማ አማካኝነት ጉልበታችንን ሰብስበንና ሃይላችንን አጠናክረን ኢ.ሰ.አ.ማን እና የድርጅት ማህበሮቻችንን ከፋሽስቶች መዳፍ ስር ፈልቅቀን ለማውጣትና ህጋዊ የትግል መስመርም ለመክፈት ትግላችንን ማፋፋም ይኖርብናል።"¹⁸⁷ Radical labour activists and the provisional leaders of CELU joined EWRU and continued their struggle by calling a general strike on 19 September 1976 against the military regime's "heinous" actions against EPRP.¹⁸⁸ Besides expressing its full support to the EPRP, EWRU also demanded the government to stop its interference in the election of workers' organizations, the reopening of the Ethiopian Teachers' Association, introduction of minimum wage, the protection of democratic rights etc. The government ignored these demands and continued its repression by arresting a number of workers both in Addis Ababa and the rest of the country. Consequently, EWRU urged its members to engage in armed struggle and take revolutionary measures against the military regime and its accomplices. It stated that:

...የመስከረም 1969 ዓም የሥራ ማቆም እርምጃ ደግሞ ሌላ ትምህት አስተምሮ አልፏል። ሌላ አዲስ የትግል በር ከፍቷል። ይህም ትግላችን በሰላማዊና ፖለቲካዊ ዘዴዎች ብቻ ወደፊት ሊራመድ እንደማይችልና የወቅቱ ፋሽስታዊ ሁኔታ የግድ ትጥቃዊ ትግል እንደሚያስፈልገው ነው። ይህም ትምህርት ላብአደሩ ከፖለቲካው ትግል ጎን ትጥቃዊ ትግሉንም እንዲያፋፍምና በጠቃሚ ባንዳዎችና አደገኛ የላብአደር ጠላቶች ላይ አብዮታዊ እርምጃ እንዲወሰድ አልፎም ለትጥቃዊ ህዝባዊ አመፅ ዝግጅት እንዲጀምር ፈቅዷል።¹⁸⁹

...The September 1976 strike taught us another lesson. It opened another new venue for struggle. That is, the Fascistic nature of the existing government indicated to us the necessity of armed struggle otherwise our struggle cannot move forward through political and peaceful ways. This lesson paved the way that along with the political struggle, the proletariats should consolidate their armed struggle and take measures over traitors and enemies of the proletariats, and on top of that to prepare for a full scale armed struggle.

¹⁸⁷"...Though the "Fascists" tried to block the chance for legal struggle, we have to consolidate our struggle by using our underground organization, EWRU and strengthen our power to bring CELU and other local unions out of the "Fascist" fist, and open the door for our legal struggle."; See also IES/CL,1175/03/2/1.1,Voice of EWRU, Sänè14, 1968 EC (21 June 1976) .

¹⁸⁸Babile Tola, *To Kill A Generation: The Red Terror in Ethiopia* (Washington: Free Ethiopian Press, 1997), p.70.

¹⁸⁹IES/CL, 1175/03/2/1.5, *Voice of EWRU*, Tahesas 10, 1969 EC (19 December 1976).

After the September 1976 general strike, the local labour organizations influenced by EWRU not only served as a battle ground for the civilian leftist parties (mainly EPRP and *Meison*) and the military regime but also they began to be involved in armed struggle. The formation of the EWRU can be seen as a milestone in keeping the momentum of the working class struggle clandestinely while a number of active labour leaders were thrown into jail.¹⁹⁰ But, one can argue that EWRU did not bring any concrete change in the working class movement during the revolution. Moreover, its unprincipled relations with the EPRP resulted in its final demise. It was used as an instrument by the EPRP in its struggle against the military. As a result, many of the EWRU members were killed during the 1977 search and destroy campaign against EPRP carried out by the military regime in collaboration with AESM. They were apparently killed suspected of being members of the EPRP, not as radical labour activists.

On the other hand, having dissolved CELU with a new labour law and destroyed EWRU by repressing most of its members, the military regime established nine industrial unions embracing all local unions based on the affinity of the different enterprises. It also established a new national labor organization, the All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU), on the basis of socialist ideology at Hagrä Hiwot (Ambo), 125 km west of Addis Ababa on 7 January, 1977. Nearly 65 union representatives with a total membership of more than 200,000 workers attended the meeting and participated in the formation of the new organization. AETU was organized from the top-down, as opposed to CELU's organizational structure of from the bottom up.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: Part II...*, p. 24.

¹⁹¹Markakis and Nega, p. 174; Desta, pp. 139-140; *Nägarit Gazèta*, Proclamation No. 64/1975, 6th December 1975, pp. 71-72.

In general, the working class and its organization, CELU, failed to play a leading role in the 1974 Ethiopian revolution because of internal and external problems. Internally, CELU was characterized by power rivalry between its leaders, loose organizational structure and illiterate staff. Externally, the infiltration of antagonistic civilian leftist groups and the interference of the military not only introduced their divisive ideology into it but also converted it into a battleground. As a result, CELU was weakened and eventually ceased to exist. Yet, one can also argue that though mistrust and division and subordination were the characteristics of a workers' organization in Ethiopia since the aborted general strike of 1963, the demise of CELU during the revolution consolidated them. Thus, the revolution did not help the working class to liberate itself and establish an independent organization; rather, it broke down the militancy of the working class and made workers' organization to remain subservient to the state to this day.

Conclusion

Even though most accounts of the Ethiopian revolution argued that the 1974 Ethiopian revolution was started in early January 1974, it was in mid February of the same year that the popular masses, including workers, students, teachers, religious leaders and urban dwellers began to be involved and change the momentum of the revolution.

Though it has been downplayed, the working class movement was one of the popular movements that paralyzed the imperial regime and tightened the tempo of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution by carrying out a series of strikes in several industrial plants. The revolution was accelerated when Ethiopian workers began to express their strong resentment against their employers and the government. For instance, the March 1974 general strike paralyzed the economy of Addis

Ababa. The revolution was, provided on opportunity to the workers to put pressure on the state and get their demands appropriately heard and thereby enhance their bargaining position vis-à-vis the employers and the state. As it was one of the legally organized sections of the society in the country then, workers played an important role in keeping the momentum of the revolution together with students until it was hijacked by the military.

Even after the military takeover, CELU served as a battleground between the civilian leftist groups and the military. Since both the military and the civilian leftist groups aspired to establish a socialist state, they focused their attention on the working class of the country. The infiltration of these opposing factions into CELU created deep cracks among workers which in turn resulted in its demise and the birth of an underground rival trade union, the Ethiopian Workers Revolutionary Union (EWRU), which was subsequently superseded by state-sponsored confederation, All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU).

In general, despite the active involvement of the militant white collar workers in several labour protests and strikes that enhanced the tempo of the revolution and in spite of the fact that workers were the only legally organized sections of the society, they were not able to bring the revolution under their control. The small number of workers in general and enlightened workers in particular, the enduring subordination of CELU's leadership to the government, the organizational problems of the confederation, and the infiltration by several leftist groups were the major factors that inhibited CELU from exerting a serious challenge and bringing about change in the status quo of the labour relations during the revolution and thereafter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MILITARY REGIME AND THE REORGANIZATION OF TRADE UNIONS ALONG THE SOCIALIST MODEL, 1977-1991

The 1974 revolution changed the political and socio-economic landscape of Ethiopia. The military which eventually got the upper hand during the revolution took state power and declared socialism as its political and economic ideology. The introduction of socialism and the subsequent nationalization of industries and services created possibilities for fundamental change in the country's labour relations. The reorganization of trade unions based on the fundamental principles of socialism essentially brought significant changes on the labour relations of the country in general and the relation between trade unions and the military government in particular. True, the relation between the military and trade unions had already started during the revolution even before the former controlled state power in September 1974.

Regardless of the series of repressions launched by the National Security Commission (NSC) against workers in several factories, CELU had continued to look at the military as a partner during the revolution until 12 September 1974. The coming to power of the military on 12 September 1974 by establishing a Provisional Military Administration Council (PMAC), however, marked the beginning of serious contradiction between CELU and the PMAC. The infiltration of the civilian leftist parties into CELU further aggravated its relation with the PMAC. The struggle between the military and the civilian leftist parties, mainly EPRP, to get

control of the Ethiopian working class seriously affected CELU. The military, which eventually crushed the civilian leftist parties one by one, was able to control and reorganize CELU along its ideological line. This was realized with the promulgation of a new labour law, Proclamation No. 64/1975 on 6 December 1975.¹ The proclamation brought about the dissolution of CELU and the establishment of a new national trade union, the All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU) in the socialist model. As a result, one can argue that the new labour law was certainly the obituary of CELU as it was replaced by AETU on 7 January 1977. Regarding the new labour law, Tefera Haile Selassie argued that though the drafting of the legislation was left to the experts of the ministry, the *Därg* had made it clear that the draft legislation had to be on the basis of the cardinal principle of socialism and democratic centralism. Above all, the new labour law provided job security to workers by curtailing employers' prerogative to hire and fire workers as they wished.² But, AETU was again reorganized as ETU on 1 May 1986.

The new labour law replaced the former confederate organizational structure with a hierarchical one. The structure was apparently designed by the regime to firmly control the labour movement. For instance, Article 50/4 of the proclamation stated that "lower trade unions shall be subordinate to the higher ones."³ Lower trade unions were often forced to accept and implement the decisions of higher trade unions. This kind of organizational structure helped the military regime to impose its own ideology over trade unions and intervene during election time. The structure also helped the *Därg* to control the leadership of AETU and undermine the solidarity of local

¹*Nägarit Gazëta*, Proclamation No.64/1975, 6th December 1975, p. 55.

²Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1991: From a Monarchial Autocracy to a Military Oligarchy* (London; New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997), p. 168.

³*Nägarit Gazëta*, Proclamation No.64/1975, 6th December 1975, p. 72.

unions. As a result, AETU was almost reduced to the status of a government agency.⁴ The regime considered the full control of workers and their organization as a fundamental step to build a socialist state. But, the workers were not given their due place in the socialist state structure, including in the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE). Even though the military allowed the Ethiopian workers to celebrate the international workers' day (May Day) and join the World Federation of Trade Unions, it restricted their foreign relations to the trade unions of socialist countries.⁵

Thus, this chapter assesses the overall relationship between CELU, AETU and ETU, and the military regime between 1977 and 1991. It tries to delve inter alia into such questions as: How did the military regime dissolve CELU and establish a new national labour organization, AETU? How did the military regime control the labour movement? What did the celebration of May Day contribute to strengthen the relation of AETU with international trade unions? What was the impact of the workers' militia in the Somalia-Ethiopian war? How did the military government support AETU's endeavor in establishing a viable relationship with international trade unions? How did AETU transform itself into ETU? What role did ETU play in the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) and in the formation of Peoples' Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE)?

4.1. The Reorganization of CELU as All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU)

⁴Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär,"Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Tarik: Kā Eisāma Gizēyawī Komitē Esekā Mäeisāma Hulätāña Gubaè," *Kefel 2, Yekatit*, 1976 EC./1984, p. 33; Tefera Haile Selassie, *Revolution...*, p.165; Peter Schwab, *Ethiopia: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Publishers Limited, 1985), p. 62.

⁵*Nägarit Gazēṭa*, Proclamation No.64/1975, 6th December 1975, pp. 71-72; John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, (Addis Ababa: Shama PLC, 1978), p. 174.

Immediately after the *Därg* took over power, it declared the socialist path for Ethiopia. It also engaged in controlling labour so as to organize a workers' party which was considered as a fundamental step in the formation a strong socialist state. As a result, CELU became one of the primary targets of the military regime. True, even before it assumed state power, the *Därg* had requested CELU to support its national objective, *Iteyopiya Teqdām* (Ethiopia First) on 8 July 1974.⁶ The relationship between the *Därg* and CELU was by and large peaceful from the end of June to the beginning of September 1974. But, following the promulgation of Proclamation No.1/1974 that decreed for the establishment of a provisional military government of Ethiopia, their relationship began to face serious setbacks. CELU opposed outright the military takeover of power and the restrictions on democratic rights. This opposition, however, further pushed the *Därg* to arrest some of the leaders of CELU and create internal division among the remaining leaders by co-opting Alām Abdi, the vice president of the confederation. Nevertheless, when the *Därg* failed to control CELU by creating internal divisions among the leaders of the confederation, it dissolved the confederation and began to reorganize it on the basis of socialist principles and models.⁷

To reorganize the confederation, the PMAC promulgated a new labour law, Proclamation No. 64/1975, on 6 December 1975. The law provided for the reorganization of local/basic labour unions and the national trade union in line with the principles of socialism. In its preamble, the proclamation stated that: "...workers can better contribute their share in building socialism, participate effectively in the development of the country and attain political consciousness, only

⁶CETU, Box No. 42, File No. 05, A Letter sent from the Chairman of the *Därg* to CELU in *Hämlè* 1, 1966EC (8 July 1974).

⁷*Nägarit Gazèta*, Proclamation No.1/1974, *Mäskäräm* 2, 1967 EC (12 September 1974), p.1; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär: Wuldät Edgät Wudqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 EC/2012), p. 144.

when they are organized in trade unions and pursue their objective systematically under the guidance of able and progressive leaders, in line with socialist principles."⁸

As compared to the previous labour law, the new labour law reduced the number of workers required to form a trade union to 20 persons. Article 49/1-6 of the new labour law, for instance, granted enterprises with twenty and more workers the right to form trade unions. In addition, it allowed enterprises engaged in similar activities and had less than twenty workers to form a general trade union jointly. Trade unions and general trade unions which were established in enterprises that engaged in similar activities/productions were also allowed to jointly form an industrial union. The nine industrial unions in turn together created the national trade union, the All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU). The administration of AETU was organized on the basis of democratic centralism. For instance, Article 50/1-8 of the newly promulgated labour law clearly indicated that AETU was created on the basis of top-down organizational structure as opposed to CELU which followed a bottom-up structure. The local unions were forced to respect every order coming from the top. Different from CELU, industrial unions were also created between basic/local unions and AETU.⁹

Contrary to Decree No. 49/1962 or Proclamation 210/1963, the new labour law denied employers the right to form a federation. True, the PMAC began to be indifferent to the Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF) immediately after it controlled state power. For instance, while CELU was given three seats in the National Advisory Committee which had a total of 52

⁸*Nägarit Gazèta*, Proclamation No.64/1975, 6th December 1975, p. 55.

⁹*Ibid*, pp. 71-72.

seats, EEF was unrepresented.¹⁰ Further, it was dissolved on 2 January 1978. In his letter to MoLSA, Mikaël Seyum, the Secretary General of EEF, announced the dissolution of the federation as per the order of the *Därg*.¹¹ Thus, one can argue that even though EEF had been playing its own role in the labour relations of the country by aligning with the state since 11 April 1964, it ceased to exist on 2 January 1978. Thereafter, the leaders of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce began to participate in tripartite conferences on behalf of the defunct EEF alongside representatives of AETU and the state. Thus, the labour relations of the country by and large continued to be confined only to trade unions and the state.

Following the provisional leadership's call for a general strike and the subsequent going of many radical labour leaders and activists underground in September 1975, the *Därg* decided to reorganize trade unions based on socialist principles. In doing so, it promulgated a new labour law and began to reorganize basic trade unions in various enterprises as per the provision of the new labour law. Basic trade unions established in various enterprises and engaged in similar industrial productions or economic activities also came together and formed nine industrial unions: Manufacturing Industrial Union; Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry and Fishing Industrial Union; Construction Industrial Union; Wholesale and Retail Trade Industrial Union; Finance, Insurance and Business Service Industrial Union; Electricity, Gas and Water Industrial Union; Social Services, Hotels, Restaurants and Recreational Services Industrial Union; Mining and Quarrying Industrial Union; Transport, Storage and Communication Industrial Union. These

¹⁰Tefera Haile Selassie, *Revolution...*, pp. 131-132; Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.71.

¹¹CETU, Box No. 44, File No. 02, A Letter written from Mikaël Seyum, the Secretary General of EEF to Tadälä Mängäša, Minister of MoLSA on 4 January 1978.

industrial unions together formed the national trade union, the All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU) and replaced CELU, which was a confederation of individual basic trade unions.¹²

Even though the reorganization of basic trade unions was already started by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) before the establishment of the Provisional Office for Mass Organization Affairs (POMOA), the task of organizing industrial unions was mainly undertaken by the POMOA after May 1976. True, POMOA was formed on 21 April 1976 by the *Därg* and other Marxist parties to organize all mass organizations, including trade unions. As a result, POMOA took the responsibility of organizing industrial unions and the national trade union. The organization of industrial unions was conducted according to Article 49/4 of the new labour law. It stated that "...unions established at the level of the undertaking and general trade unions may, without affecting their legal status, form industrial trade unions. A union established at the level of the undertaking or a general trade union may be a member of only one industrial union."¹³

The coming of POMOA to the scene of reorganizing trade unions created leadership rivalries mainly between two competing forces among the Ethiopian workers. While the first group was supported by the POMOA and the *Därg*, the second group was under the influence of EWRU and EPRP. The two competing forces fought to control the leadership of both basic trade unions and industrial unions.¹⁴ Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry and Fishing Industrial Union was established on 25 May 1976 and the remaining eight industrial unions were established thereafter. A serious struggle was waged between the two competing groups to control the leadership positions in industrial unions. For instance, the meeting which was held in the

¹²*Nägarit Gazèta*, Proclamation No, 64/1975, 6th December 1975, p. 57.

¹³*Ibid*, p.71.

¹⁴*Addis Fana*, Vol. 1, No. 6, *Yekatit*, 1969 EC, pp. 10-14; Tefera Haile Selassie, *Revolution...*, p. 177.

parliament hall from 31 May to 3 June 1976 to establish the factory industrial union and elect its leaders was interrupted and postponed for unspecified date because of the outbreak of serious confrontation between the two groups. Even though 234 members representing 300 basic trade unions assembled to establish the industrial union and elect its leaders, it ended without any result. Following the interruption of the meeting, some of the representatives were thrown into jail suspected of being members of the EPRP and making troubles during the election.¹⁵ After three months, however, the factory union was established on 9 September 1976 under strict control of the POMOA and the *Därg*.¹⁶

With the exception of the Finance, Insurance and Business Services Industrial Union, the remaining eight industrial unions were organized practically under the full control of the pro *Därg* and POMOA group.¹⁷ The struggle between the two groups, however, continued more acutely to control the leadership of the AETU. In his book, *Abyotu ena Tezetayè* (The Revolution and My Reminiscence), Fesseha Dästa clearly described the fierce struggle conducted between the *Därg* and POMOA on the one hand and the EPRP and EWRU on the other to control the leadership of AETU. He noted: "...ኢሰላማን መቆጣጠር በኢትዮጵያ ተራማጆች ዘንድ እንደወሰነ ኃይል ስለተወሰደና የወዛጀሩን የትግል መሳሪያ መጨበጥ በመሆኑ የደርግና የሌሎች ተራማጆችን ትኩረት የሳበ ጉዳይ ነበር። አዲሱን የሰራተኛ አዋጅ ተከትሎ የሚደረገው መፃኢው ምርጫም አሁንም የሕዝብ ድርጅት እና ኢሕአፓ የበላይነትን ለማግኘት የሚፋለሙበት ከፍተኛ መድረክ መሆኑ አልቀረም።"¹⁸ Though Fesseha tried to relegate the struggle to reorganize and control the

¹⁵Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratänoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratänoč Tarik: Kā Eisāma...", p. 42.

¹⁶*Ibid*, p. 49.

¹⁷Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party, Vol. II* (New York; Oxford: University Press America Inc, 1998), p.148.

¹⁸"...Since controlling CELU was regarded as a determinant factor to use labour as a weapon for struggle, it was an issue which attracted the Ethiopian leftist including the *Därg*. Thus, the election that is going to be held after the promulgation of the new labour law will also be a high prominence stage of contention between the POMOA and EPRP to get an upper hand on labour."; See also Fesseha Dästa, *Abyotu ena Tezetayè* (Los Angeles; Addis Ababa: Tsehay Publishers, 2008EC/2015) p.184.

national trade union only between the EPRP and POMOA, one can, however, argue that the top *Därg* officials were also there closely supervising the activities of the workers not only during the formation of industrial unions but also in the reorganization of the national trade union. Thus, it is dishonest to put the *Därg* out of the struggle.

Having organized the eight industrial unions, MoLSA and POMOA engaged in preparing the platform to reorganize the national trade union, AETU. The only industrial union that was not yet organized until the establishment of AETU was Finance, Insurance and Business Services Industrial Union. It was almost nearly a year after the promulgation of the new labour law that the meeting to organize AETU was held from 30 December 1976 to 7 January 1977 at Ambo town nearly 120 kilometers west of the capital, Addis Ababa. All the eight registered industrial unions sent a total of 65 delegates who represented more than 200, 000 workers to Ambo. The meeting took place in the presence of the representatives of the PMAC, POMOA and MoLSA. It was opened by Mengistu Haile Mariam, the first vice chairman of the PMAC, and chaired by Yämanä Araya, the Director of Labour in MoLSA. The meeting was started with a seminar. The presentations dealt with the history of the world proletariats, the relationship between trade unions and the state, and the similarity and difference between trade unions and the workers' party. It was apparently arranged to convince the representatives of industrial unions, control the election process and put their own choice as leaders of the national trade union. After the seminar was concluded, the representatives ratified the bylaws of AETU and elected its leaders on 7 January 1977.¹⁹

¹⁹*Addis Fana*, Vol. 1, No.6, *Yekatit* 1969 EC (February 1977), pp. 10-11; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Tarik: Kā Eisāma...", p. 52; Tefera Haile Selassie, *Revolution...*, p. 177; Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy: The Saga of an Ethiopian Labour Leader* (Baltimore: Publish America, 2010), p. 169.

The organizational structure of AETU was very narrow and controlled by the Marxist-Leninist parties, mainly *Meison*. The General Congress, the highest organ of AETU, was, for instance, represented by only its executive committee, control committee, and the executive committee of each industrial union. The basic/ local unions were not represented in the General Congress. The representatives of the General Congress were also less than a hundred altogether. Likewise, the General Council of AETU constituted only its executive committee, control committee, and two representatives from each industrial union. The total number was not more than thirty. Under the General Council, the nine men executive committee controlled the day to day activities of the organization. Though local unions had their own structure below industrial unions, they had no power to challenge the decisions passed down by the upper echelons. They were simply forced to accept any decision coming from above.²⁰ This top-down structure was designed under the principle of strict democratic centralism apparently to control the organization.

The executive committee of AETU was elected to carry out the day today activities of the organization. Accordingly, Tèwodros Bāqālā from Transport, Storage and Communication Industrial Union was elected as president, and Tāmāsgān Madèbo from Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry and Fishing Industrial Union, Alāmu Mamo from Manufacturing Industrial Union, and Tèwodros Şegèmarqos from Transport, Storage and Communication Industrial Union were elected as 1st, 2nd and 3rd vice president respectively. Like wise, Tadässā Birbo from Construction Industrial Union became the Secretary General of the organization, while Gètačāw Lāgässā from Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry and Fishing Industrial Union and Aṭenafu Tačā from Transport, Storage and Communication Industrial Union were elected as 1st and 2nd deputy Secretary

²⁰Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratāñoč Mahebār, "Selä Mäeisāma Badis Mälk Täṭānakero Mādārajāt Yāqārāb Yāzgejet Māglāča," *Tahesas*, 1974 EC (December, 1981), p. 17.

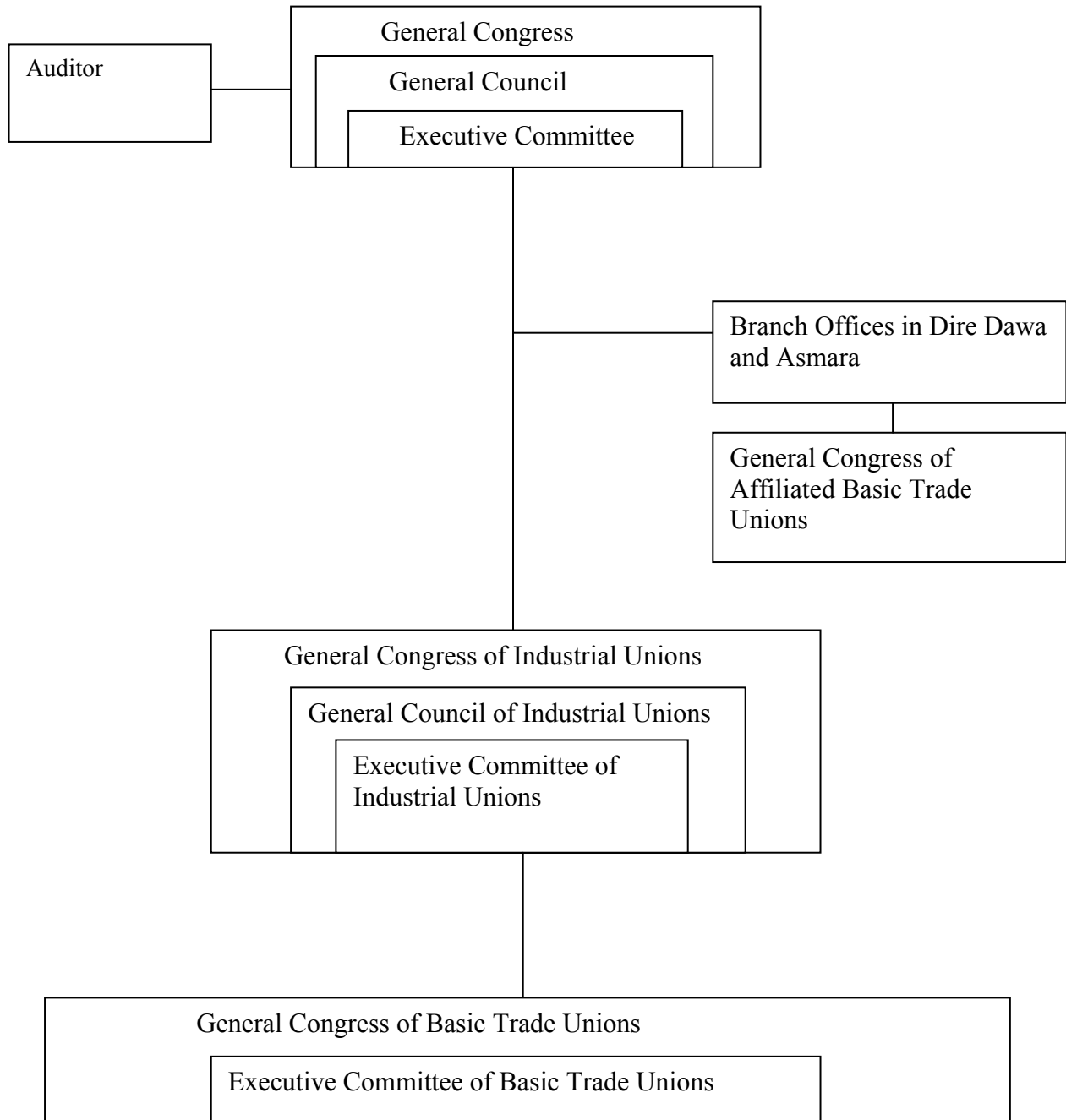
General respectively. In addition, Kābādā Gäbrä Mikaël from Transport, Storage and Communication Industrial Union and Almaz Abābā from Manufacturing Industrial Union were elected as Treasurer and Deputy Treasurer respectively. Haylā Selasè Zāray from Manufacturing Industrial Union, George Bālāṭā from Construction Industrial Union and Asāfa Mamo from Transport, Storage and Communication Industrial Union were also elected as auditors of the organization.²¹

What is worth mentioning here is that the executive committee was fully composed of workers who were members of the Marxist Leninist parties mainly the All Ethiopian Socialist Party (the Amharic Acronym, *Meison*). For instance, Tèwodros Bāqālā, who represented the Transport, Storage and Communication Industrial Union and elected as president, and Tāmāsgān Madèbo who represented the Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry and Fishing Industrial Union and elected as first vice-president were members of *Meison*.²² The domination of AETU by *Meison* cadres further instigated the EWRU to denounce the organization and attack its newly elected leaders. Consequently, AETU continued to be a battleground for the *Dārg* and its Marxist coalition on the one hand and the EPRP and EWRU on the other until the total annihilation of the latter.

²¹ *Addis Fana*, Vol. 1, No. 6, *Yekatit*, 1969EC (February 1977), pp. 10-11; Yā Mälāw Itēyopiya Sāratāñoč Mahebār, "Yā Itēyopiya Sāratāñoč Tarik: Kā Eisāma...", p. 53.

²² *Addis Fana*, Vol. 1, No. 7, *Mägabiti* 1969EC (March 1977), p. 13.

Figure 4.1. The Organizational Structure of AETU



Source: Yä MälawItteyopiya SäratäñočMahebär, "Selä Mäeisäma Badis Mälk Täṭānakero...", p. 16.

Despite the multitude of challenges posed by EPRP and EWRU, the sympathizers of the *Därg* and POMOA managed to get control of the leadership of AETU. Thus, one can argue that AETU

was by and large organized under the firm control of the government when a number of active leaders of basic trade unions were put behind bars and most of the provisional leaders of CELU were forced to go underground. The establishment of AETU, thus, marked the failure of establishing an independent labour movement in Ethiopia. Regarding this, Kiflu Tadesse asserted that the formation of AETU under government control constituted "*the coup de grace*"²³ for the establishment of an independent labour movement in Ethiopia. Though this kind of argument is expected from one of the top leaders of EPRP, the party which championed itself as the vanguard of the working class and struggled to control the labour movement, as a matter of fact, the formation of an independent labour movement was hardly possible during the military regime.

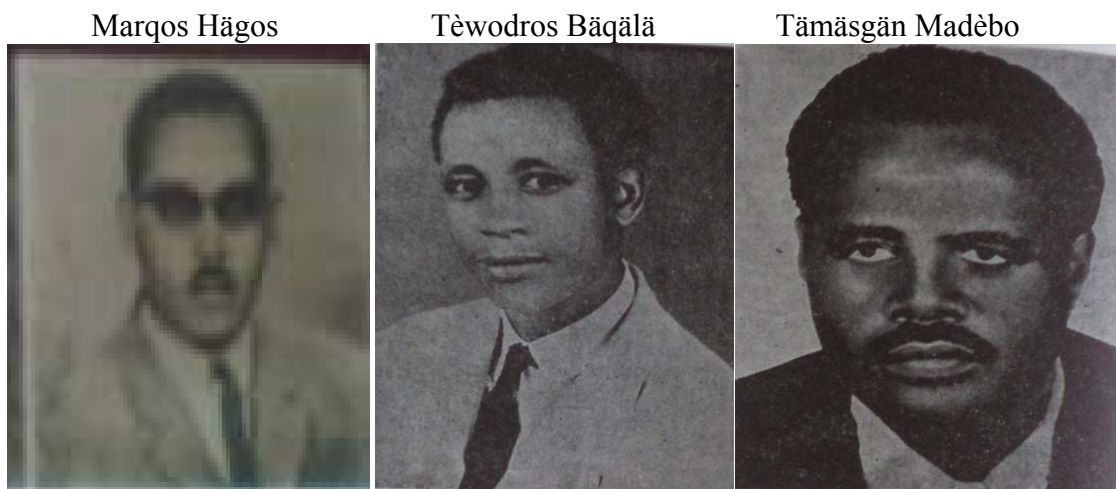
The struggle between the workers who were sympathizers and supporters of EPRP and EWRU on the one hand and the supporters and sympathizers of the *Därg* and POMOA on the other, however, continued even after the establishment of AETU. Consequently, a number of labour leaders and activists were killed. For instance, the first two leaders of AETU, Tèwodros Bāqālā and Tāmāsgān Madēbo were believed to have been killed by the EPRP defence and operation squads. While Tèwodros was killed in his office in broad daylight on 25 February 1977, Tāmāsgān was shot while he was going to visit his friend's wife at the Gandhi Memorial Maternity Hospital on 18 September 1977 and died the next day. The EWRU defense and operation squads also killed Kābādā Gābrā Mikaèl, the treasurer of AETU, on 3 December 1977.²⁴ These actions further escalated the *Därg's* repression on workers in several factories on suspicion of being EPRP and EWRU members. The government declared a comprehensive

²³Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party, Vol. II ...*, p. 147.

²⁴*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, *Ṭeqmet*, 1970 EC (October, 1977); *Addis Zāmān*, *Māgabit* 15, 1970 EC (24 March 1978); Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 56.

search campaigns to expose and dismantle EPRP and its affiliates. The revolutionary defense squads organized at *qābällè* (the lowest administrative unit in the country) and factory levels actively participated in apprehending and killing the suspects. For instance, Marqos Hägos, the provisional leader of the defunct CELU and sympathizer of EPRP and EWRU, was killed by the revolutionary defence squad around Širo Mèda in Addis Ababa on the 2nd day of the first round house to house search campaign on 25 March 1977.²⁵

Figure 4.2. Labour Leaders Killed in the Struggle between EPRP and the *Därg*



Source: The Picture of Marqos Hägos is taken from the office of the Confederation and the rest are taken from *Addis Zāmān*, *Mägabit* 15, 1970 EC (24 March 1978).

Even though the propaganda warfare between EPRP and Mengistu's Marxist coalition had already been exacerbated with the killing of one another's members since mid September 1976, it was after the ascent of Mengistu to power as chairman of the *Därg* in early February 1977 that the struggle between the two warring groups was highly intensified. True, in September 1976,

²⁵IES/CL 2393/04/2/3.2, *Abyot*, Vol. II, No.3, 1977, p. 63; Ethiopian Herald, 27 March 1977(*Mägabit* 18, 1969 EC); Jacob Wiebel, "Revolutionary Terror Campaigns in Addis Ababa, 1976-1978," PhD Dissertation; University of Oxford: Department of History, 2014, p. 137;Tefera Haile Selassie, *Revolution....*,p.168; Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy...*, p. 167.

the *Därg* openly designated EPRP members as a bunch of "anarchists" and called for the general public to expose and destroy them. At the same time, EPRP also responded by establishing its defense and operation squads declaring an urban armed struggle against the *Därg* and its Marxist coalition. It was also at this time that EWRU joined the urban struggle to liberate the labour movement from the shackles of the *Därg* and its Marxist coalition.²⁶ After he exterminated potential opponents including Täfäri Bānti, the chairman of the *Därg*, in a palace coup on 3 February 1977, Mengistu emerged as an unchallenged leader of the PMAC. In his speech to the general public who came out for demonstration at *abyot adābabay* (the revolution square) on 4 February 1977 in support of his revolutionary action against his rivals inside the *Därg* who were suspected as EPRP members, Mengistu promised to arm the broad masses and destroy the remaining suspects and all anti-revolutionaries across the country. Accordingly, each *yä abyot ṭebāqa guad* (the revolutionary defence squad) began to be armed and was engaged in destroying suspected EPRP members in rural and urban areas including workers in several enterprises.²⁷ Thus, one can argue that the revolutionary defence squads were simply local militias created in peasant associations, trade unions, urban *qābällès* and government owned businesses to defend the regime from its opponents.

The revolutionary defence squad was first created in peasant associations around late 1975 to carry on the necessary security measures against trouble makers in rural Ethiopia as per the directives of the regime in power. It was organized on the basis of Article 11/1-6 of the

²⁶IES/CL 1775/03/2/1.4, *Voice of Elä'ama* (the Amharic acronym of EWRU), Vol.1, No.4, *Mäskärām* 8, 1969 EC (18 September 1977), p. 3; IES/CL 1775/03/2/1.5 *Voice of Elä'ama*, Vol.1, No.9, *Tahesas* 10, 1969 EC (19 December 1977), p. 2.

²⁷*Yä Mälaw Itēyopiya Säratāñoč Mahebär*, "Selä Mäeisäma Badis Mälk Täñnakero...", p.56; John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1978), p. 201; Peter Schwab, pp. 32-33; Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 211.

Associations Organization and Consolidation Proclamation No.71/1975 that provided each peasant association the right to establish a peasant revolutionary defence squad that could protect members and neighborhood from trouble makers.²⁸

Eventually, urban dwellers and workers also started to organize defence squads nearly a year after the establishment of the peasant associations' defence squads. The Ministry of Public Housing and Development promulgated the Urban Dwellers' Associations Consolidation and Municipalities Proclamation No.104/ 1976 on 9 October 1976. The proclamation gave enormous judicial and administrative powers to the newly organized *qäbällès*. It also empowered them to control crime and any counter revolutionary activities in their jurisdiction by establishing public safety committees which was eventually renamed as *yä abyot ṭebäqa guad* committee (the revolutionary defence squad committee). According to Article 10/e of the proclamation, the committee was responsible "...to carry on guarding and security activities in accordance with directives issued by the Ministry of Interior."²⁹ It was, however, this committee that was later used as one of the most deadly instruments of repression in the hands of the *Därg* against its opponents.³⁰

It was also on the basis of the provisions of this proclamation that several trade unions organized their own *yä abyot ṭebäqa guad* committee which was instrumental in exposing and killing many workers in several factories who were suspected as EPRP members. Most of the members of the

²⁸*Nägarit Gazèṭa*, Proclamation No. 71/1975, 14 December 1975; Desalegn Rahmato, *Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia* (Motala: Motala Grafiska AB, 1984), p.81; Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity...*, p.157; Edmond J. Keller, "State, Party and Revolution in Ethiopia," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1, March 1985, p. 6. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/524564>; Andargachew Tiruneh, pp. 208-209.

²⁹*Nägarit Gazèṭa*, Proclamation No.104/1976, 9 October 1976.

³⁰Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party, Vol. II...*, p. 110; Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity...*, p. 55; Rene Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?* Translated by A.M. Berrett (New Jersey: Zed Press, 1983), p. 171.

revolutionary defence squads in each factory were recruited from the civilian leftist parties aligned with the *Därg*, mainly from *Meison*. The creation of the defence squads in each factory further escalated the problem of workers. The defence squads were entrusted to carry out all activities on behalf of the local police force. Nevertheless, since they were organized on the basis of a political decision, their political role was much more significant than their endeavor to control other crimes. The defence squads were often supported by government security agents in apprehending a number of active labour leaders and labour activists who were suspected as EPRP members.³¹ Even though revolutionary defence squads were organized in several factories since late 1976, they were not armed until February 1977 apparently because of disagreement among the *Därg* top officials on the arming of the broad masses, including workers.

Since February 1977, several revolutionary defence squads which were organized at *qäbällè* and factory levels began to get armed and engage in exposing and eliminating suspected EPRP and EWRU members. In both cases, the squads were virtually dominated by *Meison* cadres who were passionate about taking revenge on EPRP and EWRU members. Since every *qäbällè* was empowered to maintain public safety in its surrounding, it often worked hand in hand with the workers' revolutionary defence squads of several factories located under its jurisdiction.³²

A number of workers who were suspected as EPRP members were exposed and killed not only by the workers' revolutionary defence squads but also by *qäbällè* revolutionary defence squads. For instance, Germa Kābādä, a *Meison* cadre and the leader of *qäbällè* 7 in Arat killo, was known for his monstrous killing of a number of people in his jurisdiction. Besides his position as

³¹*Voice of AETU*, Vol. 1, No. 5, *Yekatit* 1970 EC (February 1978); Markakis and Nega, p. 202; Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party, Vol. II...*, p. 68; Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 208.

³²Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity...*, p. 55.

a chairman of the *qäbällè*, Germa was in charge of the *qäbällè* revolutionary defence squad that brutally murdered nine workers from Berhanena Sälam Printing Press in public during the first round comprehensive search campaign conducted from 23 to 27 March 1977. The victims were Berhanu Bälačäw, Häylu Abäbä, Ṭelahun Gäbrä Maryam, Ṭelahun Bäqälä, Zäwdnäš Wana, Worqnäš Kabtyemär, Yohānes Awgačäw, Šähäyä Haylä Selasè and Daro Nägaš. The killing of ,Daro Nägaš, who was active in the EPRP's clandestine workers organization, Ethiopian Workers Revolutionary Union (EWRU), and was the president of the Workers' Union of Berhanena Sälam Printing Press, created panic among the rest of the workers. When she was murdered Daro was a mother of eight children and eight months pregnant.³³ Thus, one can argue that workers were one of the most victimized sections of the society who served as battleground for the rival warring squads during the white and red terrors that ravaged the country.

On 4 February 1977, Mengistu declared the transformation of the revolution from defensive to offensive position and promised to distribute arms to the broad masses. The promise was practically implemented when the government started its devastating and massive offensive in urban areas on 6 March 1977. On this day, to fulfill Mengistu's promise, the *Därg's* vice chairman Aṭenafu Abatä, distributed arms to 600 workers who came from 20 different factories located in and around Addis Ababa and 13 *qäbällè* revolutionary defence squads. In the following days, the revolutionary defence squads established across the country both at *qäbällè* and factory levels were armed and deployed to take urgent action on suspected EPRP and

³³IES/CL 2393/04/2/3.2; *Abyot* Vol. II, NO. 3, May-June, 1977, p. 8; Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party, Vol. II...*, p.23; Wiebel, p. 147; Babile Tolla, *To Kill a Generation: The Red Terror in Ethiopia* (Washington D.C: Free Ethiopian Press, 1989), p. 138; Andargachew Asegid, *Ba Ačer yä Täqäčä Räjem Guzo* (Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1992 EC/2000), p. 410. Nevertheless, in the same page, the author claimed that the killer was never been a member of *Meison*.

EWRU members and to dismantle all other counter revolutionary forces which were countering the revolution and undermining the preservation of national unity.³⁴

Figure 4.3. Lieutenant Colonel Aṭenafu Abatä Distributing Arms to Workers



Source: *Addis Zāmān*, *Yekatit* 27, 1969 EC (6 March 1977)

The government together with AETU continued to arm several factory revolutionary defence squads throughout the country. For instance, the government distributed arms to the revolutionary defence squads of Wonji-Šāwa sugar factory trade union in Wonji stadium on 6 March 1977. On the occasion, Tāmāsgān Madēbo, the first vice president of AETU, urged the revolutionary defence squads of the two factories which were dominated by *Meison* cadres to pluck out trouble makers among the workers and defend the revolution. The workers also showed their solidarity to the government by condemning EPRP and its supporters.³⁵

³⁴*Addis Zāmān*, *Yekatit* 27, 1969 EC (6 March 1977) Yä Mälaw Itēyopiya Sārātāñoč Mahebār, "Selä Mäeisāma Badis Mälk Täṭānakero...", p. 56; Peter Schwab, *Ethiopia: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Francis Pinters/ Publishers, 1985), pp. 32-33; Andargachew Tiruneh, pp. 208-209.

³⁵*Addis Zāmān*, *Yekatit* 29, 1969 EC (8 March 1977).

Figure 4.4. The Workers of Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Demonstrating in Support of the War of Annihilation on EPRP



Source: *Addis Zāmān*, *Yekatit* 29, 1969 EC (8 March 1977).

The squads were remembered for their ruthless actions on suspected EPRP and EWRU members during the first round *asäsa* (search campaign) conducted from 23 to 27 March 1977. The revolutionary defence squads conducted the search not only inside Wonji-Šäwa sugar factory but also in many other factories around Nazareth, Aqaqi, Mälkasädi and Mojo. They apprehended a number of workers and gave them to government security agents.³⁶ But, there were also circumstances in which the squads publicly murdered suspected EPRP members.³⁷

³⁶Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Plantation Workers' Unions, *Yä Wonji Sekuar Mameräča Derejit Wozadär Ačər Yätəgel Tarik*, 1977", p. 11; Wonji- Šäwa Sugar Plantation Workers' Unions, *Wonji ena Tegelu*, A Bulletin published by the workers' unions on 5 *Ter* 1970 EC (13 January 1978), p.17.

³⁷Informants: Šimäles Täklè; Berhānu Mamo and Aräga Enešaw

Figure 4.5. The Wonji-ŠāwaSugar Factory Workers Revolutionary Defence Squads Receiving Arms



Source: *Addis Zāmān*, *Yekatit* 29, 1969 EC (8 March 1977)

The distribution of arms to the revolutionary defence squads of several factories across the country continued in the months of March and April. On 8 March 1977, for instance, the revolutionary defence squads of eight different factories: Aqaqi Textile Factory, Ethiopian Fiber Factory, Ethio-Leather Factory, Uni-Fiber Factory, Roof Sheet Factory, Plastic and Shoe Factory, *Azi* Factory and *Afa* Factory located in and around Aqaqi were armed and deployed to dismantle EPRP and its supporters in the area. Immediately after they got arms, they engaged in attacking workers who were suspected as EPRP and EWRU members. The squads carried out a search campaign in their respective factory and apprehended a number of workers who were suspected as EPRP members and gave them to the concerned body.³⁸

³⁸ *Addis Zāmān Mägabit* 1, 1969 EC (10 March 1977).

Figure 4.6. Suspected EPRP Members Apprehended from Eight different Factories in Aqaqi



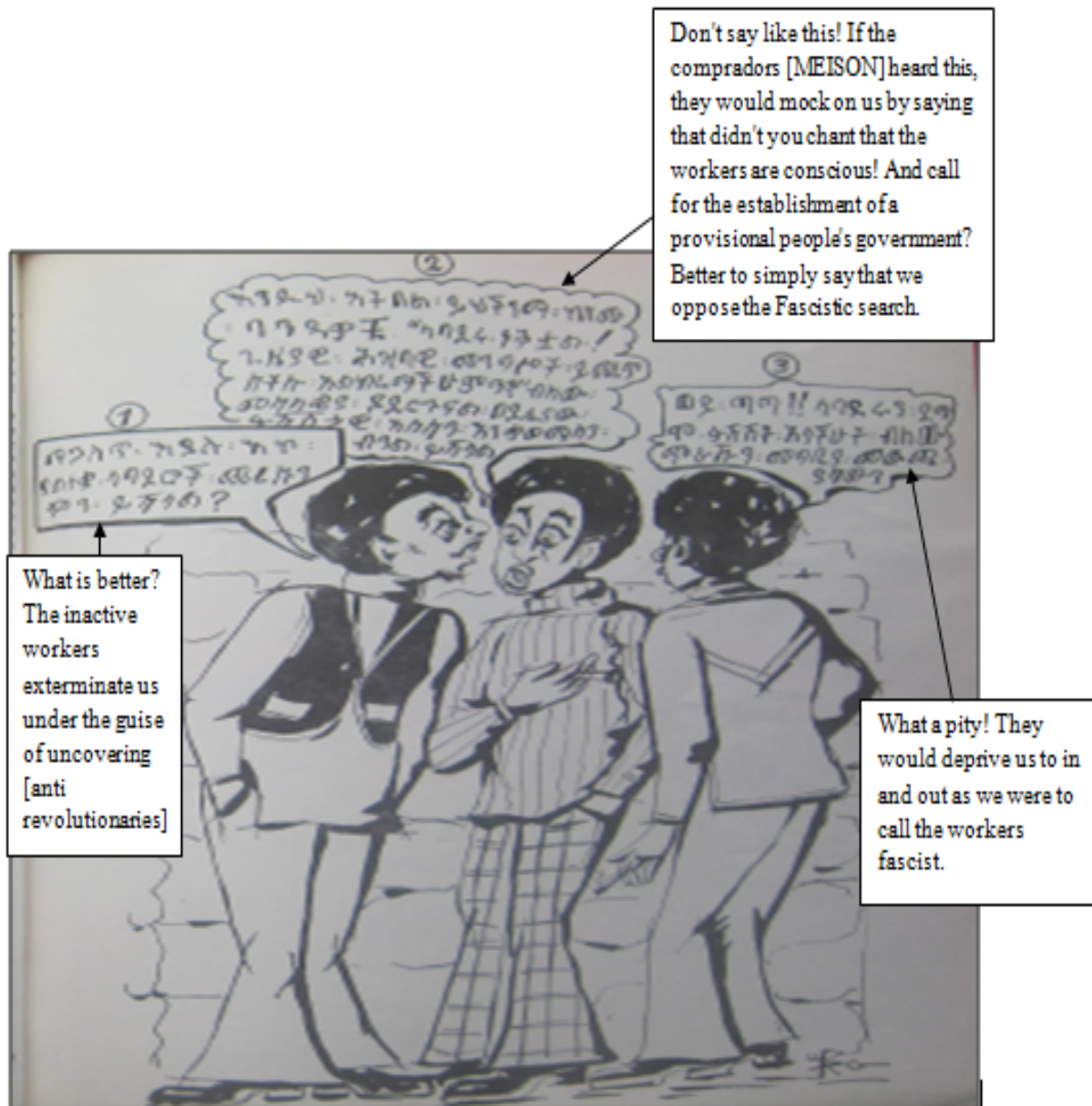
Source: *Addis Zämän, Mägabit 1*, 1969 EC (10 March 1977)

More importantly, the revolutionary defence squads of each factory across the country actively participated during the comprehensive search campaigns conducted in two rounds from 23 to 27 March 1977 and 6 to 9 May 1977. The revolutionary defence squads of each factory together with the government security agents exposed and apprehended a number of workers who were suspected as EPRP members. In doing so, they contributed a lot to the military regime in repressing active workers and dismantling the network of EPRP inside several factories across the country. Moreover, the regime effectively used each revolutionary defence squad established at factory level during the war of annihilation designated as *qäy šiber* (Red Terror) against the EPRP and EWRU urban armed struggle, which was dubbed as *näçe šiber* (white terror).³⁹ One can argue that the revolutionary defence squads in several factories across the country were used as instruments during the red terror. EPRP members were virtually made scapegoat by their

³⁹Yä Mälaw Itēyopiya Säratāñoč Mahebär, "Selä Mäeisäma Badis Mälk Täjänakero...", pp. 56-57; Babile, p.77; Andargachew, pp. 208-209

fellow workers. The situation of EPRP members in every factory during the comprehensive search campaigns conducted for two rounds was clearly portrayed by the supporter of the regime as follows.

Figure 4.7. A Cartoon that Depicts the Situation of EPRP Members during the Search Campaigns



Source: *Addis Fana*, Vol. 1 No. 9, 1969 EC, p. 41

In general, since its establishment AETU became a battleground in the struggle between EPRP and its labour wing, EWRU, on the one hand and the *Därg* and its Marxist coalition on the other. They created their own defence squads and killed a number of workers whom they thought stood against their group. But, the revolutionary defence squads established by the regime eventually got the upper hand in every factory and totally dismantled EPRP and its sympathizers.

Regardless of the devastating effect on the organization as a consequence of the rival terrors, the sympathizers and supporters of the *Därg* and POMOA managed to cleanse AETU of the ardent supporters of EPRP and EWRU and brought it under their firm control. Nevertheless, since the government proclaimed a new labour law, Proclamation No. 222/1982, only for trade unions, AETU was forced to restructure itself in line with the political development of the country. This was done mainly to make the structure of the organization fit with the structure of the Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE). Moreover, the proclamation was also issued to enable AETU to participate in the socio-economic and political programs of the regime. In its preamble, the proclamation stated that "... it is necessary to provide for the organization of strong trade unions which can effectively participate in the formulation of economic, social and political plans and policies with a view to enabling workers to play their vanguard role in the building of the people's democratic republic of Ethiopia."⁴⁰ It was also hoped that the proclamation would help workers to effectively discharge their revolutionary and national duties. However, most of the basic provisions of the new law were quite similar with Proclamation No. 64/1975. It was proclaimed apparently to change only the organizational structure of AETU and make it fit with the structure of COPWE.

⁴⁰*Nägarit Gazèta*, No. 6, Proclamation No. 222/1982, Addis Ababa 24th May 1982.

The General Council of AETU that met from 29 June to 2 July 1982 clearly indicated that the law was mainly initiated by the COPWE for its own sake. In its report, the council argued that:

...አብዮታችን በደረሰበት ዕድገትና ሠራተኛው በሚያደርገው አብዮታዊ የሥራ እንቅስቃሴና ለአብዮታዊ ተሳትፎ መጎልበት የቀድሞው የመ.ኢ.ሠ.ማ መዋቅር አመች ባለመሆኑ ታሪካዊው የኢሠፓአኮ ማዕከላዊ ኮሚቴ 2ኛ መደበኛ ስብሰባ በአሳለፈው ውሳኔ መሰረት አብዮታዊ መንግስት የሰራተኛ አዋጅ ቁጥር 222/74ን በማወጁ ሠራተኞች በሥራ ሥምሪትና በቦታ ክልል ተደራጅተው የመኢሠማ 2ኛ ጉባኤ በተሟላና ዲሞክራሲያዊ በሆነ ሁኔታ ሊካሄድ ችሏል።⁴¹

...Since the former organizational structure of AETU was not convenient for the workers to strengthen their revolutionary participation and revolutionary activities with the current stage of development that the revolution has achieved, and as the revolutionary government declared Proclamation No 222/1982 on the basis of the resolution of the 2nd historic regular meeting of COPWE Central Committee, the workers were organized in accordance with their geographical location and on the type of work they engage in, and conducted the 2nd General Congress of AETU democratically with nearly all members in attendance.

A day before the meeting, Kassa Kābādā, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, also briefed journalists that the participants of the meeting were expected to reach an agreement on the restructuring of AETU in line with COPWE. He added that if AETU restructured itself, it would get the political and ideological leadership from COPWE and would work for the establishment of the workers' party and implement the principles of proletarian internationalism in all its engagements.⁴²

In his speech to the participants of the first COPWE Council meeting which was held on 16 June 1980, Mengistu Haile Mariam expressed the need for restructuring AETU in line with the already established COPWE and the upcoming Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE). He noted that: "...ሶሻሊዝምን ለሚገነባ ኅብረተሰብ የሠራተኛው ማህበር ሌኒን እንዳለው የኮሚኒዝም ትምህርት ቤት እንደመሆኑ መሪ ማዕከል ባልነበረበት የተዋቀረው መኢሰማ ዛሬ ኢሠፓአኮ ከተከሰተ በኋላ ከዚህ የፖለቲካ ድርጅትና ነገም ከፓርቲው ተገቢውን አመራር

⁴¹All Ethiopian Trade Unions, "A Report of the General Council of AETU 2nd Regular Meeting," *Mägabit* 1975 EC (March 1983), p. 2

⁴²*Addis Zāmān*, *Sänè* 22, 1974 EC (29 June 1982).

ለማግኘት በሚቻልበት ሁኔታ እንደገና ማዋቀር አስፈላጊ።"⁴³ Even though he stressed in his speech that it was urgent to restructure AETU in line with the political development of the country, it took his government nearly two years to make it happen.

Worth mentioning here is that COPWE was established under Proclamation No 174/ 1979 which came into force as of 18 December 1979 aiming at instilling Marxism-Leninist ideology among the general public and creating a platform for the establishment of WPE.⁴⁴ The formation of COPWE marked the culmination of POMOA and the Union of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations (in its Amharic acronym called *Imaledeh*).⁴⁵ It was Article 3/1 of Proclamation No.174/1979 that repealed the proclamation promulgated earlier to improve the organization and operation of POMOA. It reads: "...the Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs Organizational and Operations Improvement Proclamation No. 119/1977 is hereby repealed."⁴⁶

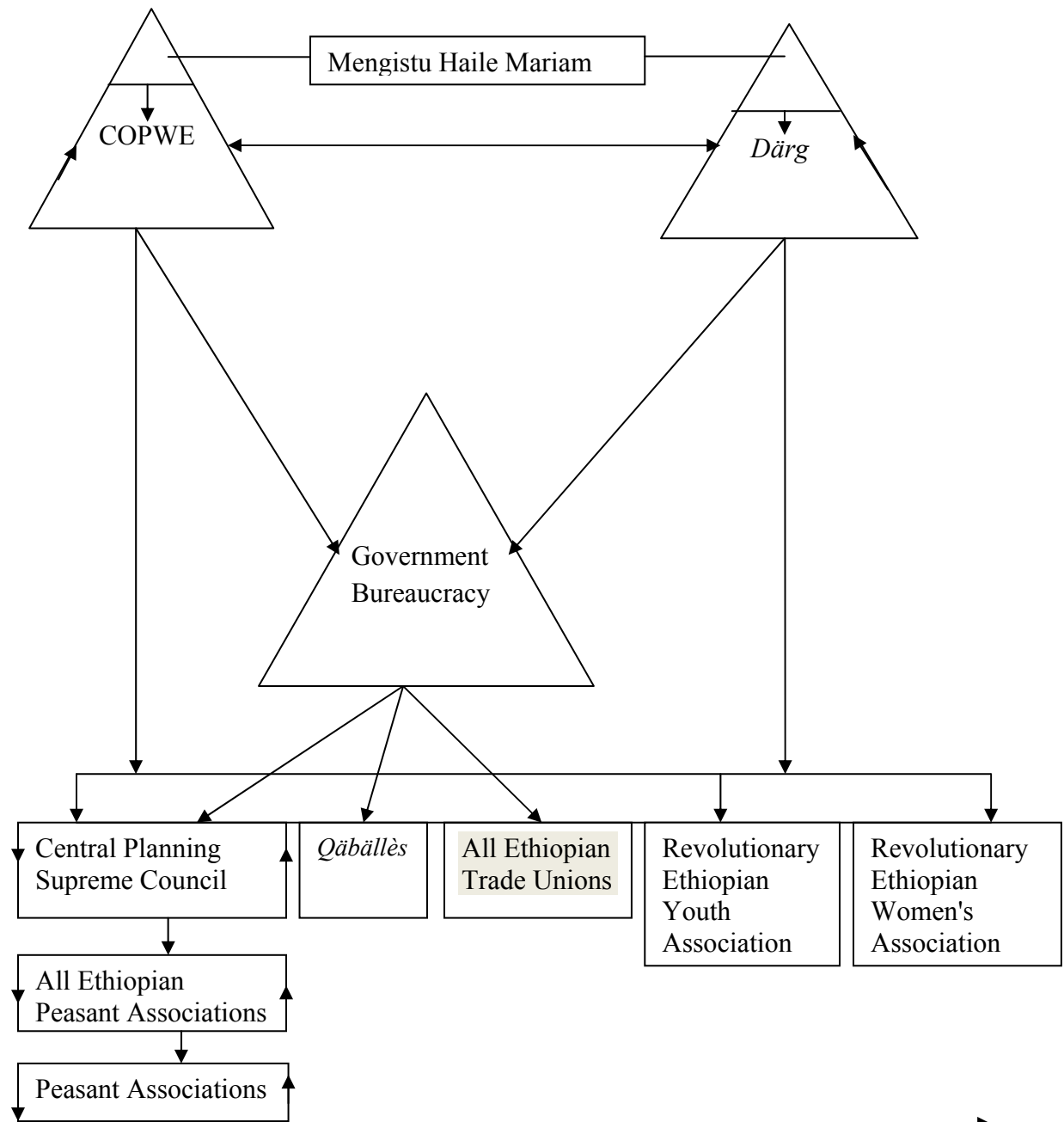
⁴³"...For the society engaged in building socialism, since a trade union as Lenin said, is a school of communism, the AETU organized in the absence of a vanguard party should now be streamlined and reorganized in a manner that would make it responsive to the leadership of the already emerged COPWE and the upcoming party [WPE]." See also PMAC and COPWE, *Speech Delivered by Comrade Chairman Mengistu Haile Mariam, Chairman of the PMAC and COPWE and Commander-in Chief of the Revolutionary Army of Socialist Ethiopia to the Second Congress of the All Ethiopian Trade union*, Addis Ababa: June 29th 1982, p. 42; Yä Mälaw Ityopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Ityopiya Säratäñoč Tarik: Kā Eisāma...", pp. 96-97.

⁴⁴*Nägarit Gazēta*, Proclamation No. 174/179, 26th January 1980.

⁴⁵*Imaledeh* was organized on 20 April 1976 by five leftist parties: All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (Amharic acronym, *Meison*), Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization (Amharic acronym, *Malred*), Labour League (Amharic acronym *Waz* League), Ethiopian Oppressed People's Struggle (Amharic acronym, *Eçat*) and Revolutionary Flame (*Abyotawi Sädäd*); See also Tefera Haile Selassie, *Revolution...*, p.172; Andargachew, p. 177.

⁴⁶*Nägarit Gazēta*, Proclamation No. 174/179, 26th January 1980.

Figure 4.8. AETU under the Structure of COPWE and the *Därg*



Source: Peter Schwab, *Ethiopia: Politics, Economics and Society...*, p. 48.

Consequently, COPWE was able to control all mass organizations in the country including trade unions. AETU also began to work hand in hand with COPWE as one of the agencies of the government. The above diagram clearly indicated how COPWE controlled AETU.⁴⁷

The responsibility for mass organization affairs, including organizing trade unions, was taken by the COPWE units established at all levels in the administrative structure of the country. It aimed mainly at propagating the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism among the civil servants, cooperatives and mass organizations, including trade unions in order to establish a strong workers' party on the basis of the principles of Marxism-Leninism. All mass organizations, including trade unions, were instructed to cooperate with COPWE. For instance, Article 17 of the proclamation stated that "...any natural or juridical person, government office, government or mass organizations shall have the duty to co-operate with COPWE in all its activities to implement the purposes of this proclamation."⁴⁸ Thus, one can argue that the promulgation of proclamation No. 222/1982 aimed merely to restructure AETU in line with COPWE and to facilitate the establishment of WPE. Moreover, the government promulgated it to effectively control the labour movement. For instance, Edmond J. Keller argued that "... One of the main purposes of the new code was to tighten government control over labor in the modern sector."⁴⁹

As organizing the party of the working people of Ethiopia was the main duty of COPWE, it initiated the reorganization of AETU in line with its structure. Membership to COPWE was allowed primarily for workers along with members of the revolutionary army, peasants and

⁴⁷Schwab, p. 48.

⁴⁸*Nägarit Gazèta*, Proclamation No. 174/1979, 26th 1980.

⁴⁹ Edmond J.Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p.219.

progressive intelligentsia. It had an organizational structure going down to the basic organization at *qäbällè* level. However, AETU was represented neither in the executive committee of COPWE, which had seven members, nor in its General Council, which comprised of ninety three permanent and thirty provisional members.⁵⁰ Even though the proclamation dictated that membership should be primarily given to workers, the higher position of the commission remained under the control of the military.

Figure 4.9. Central Committee Members of COPWE

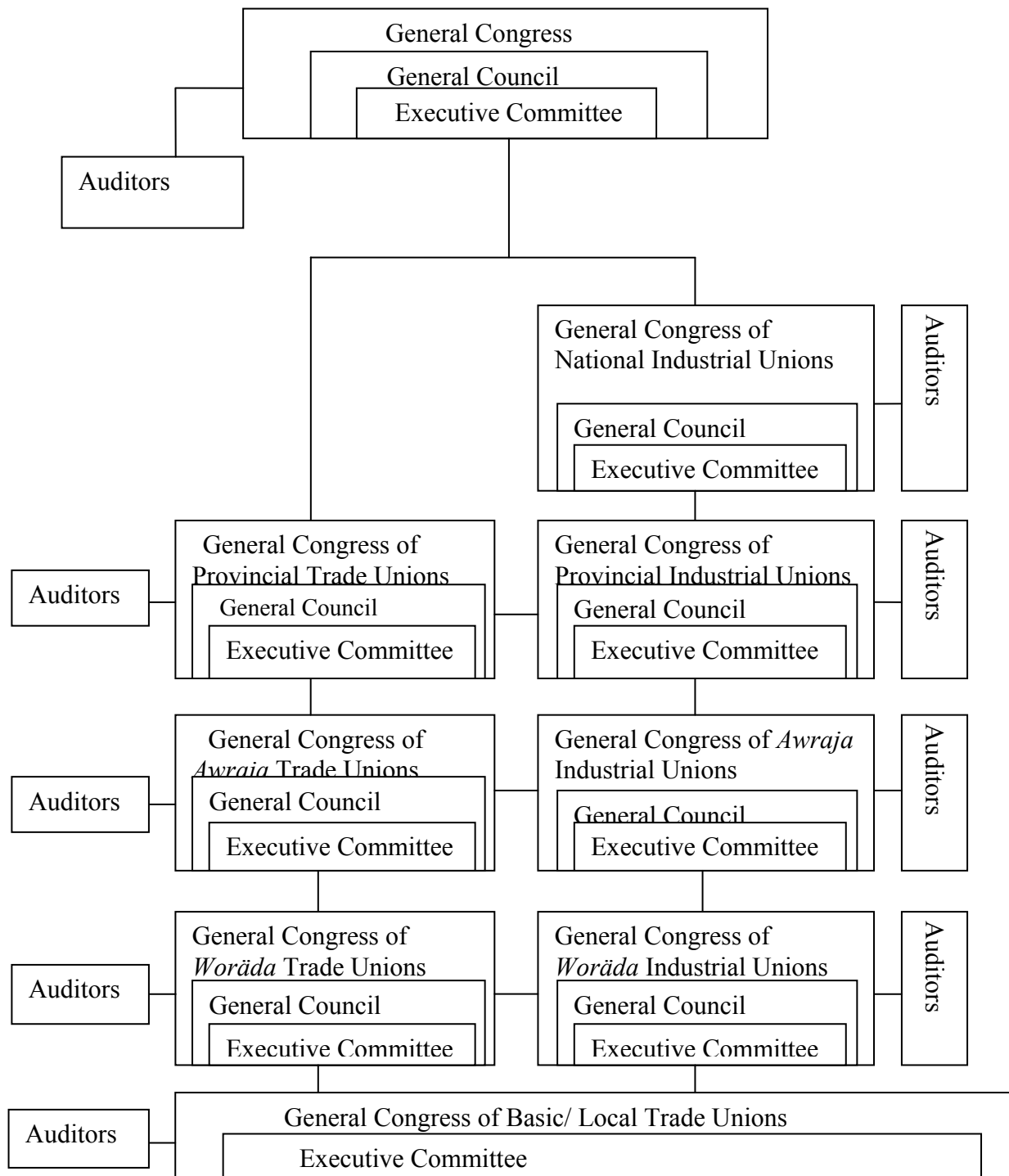


Source: *Särtoadär* June 17, 1972 EC (24 June 1980).

More importantly, the organizational structure of AETU was amended to bring the activities of workers at all levels under the control of the COPWE. Thus, basic trade unions organized at factory level continued to be organized as general and industrial union at *woräda* (district), *awraja* (sub province) and *kefelä hägär* (province) levels and eventually resulted in the formation of the national industrial unions and the national trade union (AETU).

⁵⁰*Särtoader*, June 17, 1972 EC (24 June 1980).

Figure 4.10. The Revised Structure of AETU after 1982



Source: Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratänoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratänoč Tarik: Kā Eisāma...", pp. 50-51; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratänoč Mahebär, "Selä Mäeisāma Badis Mälk Täñanaker...", pp. 56-57.

The newly introduced structure was very complex and characterized by a mix of responsibilities and powers between the general and industrial unions across the administrative structure of the country. For instance, out of over 287,000 members, about 26, 000 became officials of AETU and had to hold additional positions that carried out similar activities. As a result, AETU became too cumbersome to function properly. The structure also created problems to the leaders of COPWE. Nevertheless, COPWE completed its mission and was replaced by the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in September 1984 without amending the intricate structure of AETU. But, the structure was changed two years later when it was transformed into Ethiopian Trade Unions (ETU) on 1 May 1986.⁵¹

The political influence of the government through COPWE and later through WPE further reduced AETU and later ETU to act as one of the government agencies in the country. Besides the political intervention, the government also controlled the financial arm of the organization. For instance, it allocated budget to the organization every year. This made the organization economically dependent on the government. The following table shows the amount of budget allocated to the organization in the years between 1975/76 and 1987/88. Though the budget seemed insignificant, it made the organization very subordinate to the government.

⁵¹Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy...*, p. 171.

Table 1 -Annual Budgets Allocated by the Military Regime to AETU/ETU from 1975/76-1987/88

Budget Year	Amount in Birr	Remark
1975/76	230,200.00	Budgeted by the Government
1976/77	260,541.00	"
1977/78	600,000.00	"
1978/79	650,000.00	"
1979/80	728,920.00	"
1980/81	1,023,432.00	"
1981/82	1,139,964.00	"
1982/83	1,139,964.00	"
1983/84	800,000.00	"
1984/85	800,000.00	"
1985/86	500,000.00	"
1986/87	450,000.00	"
1987/88	450,000.00	"

Source: *Nägarit Gazèta*, No.40, Hämlè 18, 1967 EC (25 July 1975, No. 2 *Mäskäräm* 27, 1969 EC (7 October 1976), No. 27, *Nähäsè* 20, 1969 EC (26th August 1977), No. 1, *Mäskäräm* 27, 1971EC (7th October 1978), No. 2, *Hedar* 12, 1972EC (November 22, 1979), No. 6, *Hedar* 15 1973EC (November 24 1980), No. 5, *Yekatit* 15, 1974EC (22 February 1982), No. 11, *Genbot* 3, 1975EC (11May 1983), No. 5, *Tahesas* 23, 1976EC (2 January 1984), No. 12, *Miyazia* 16, 1977 EC (24 April 1985), No. 4, *Yekatit* 16, 1978 EC(23 February 1986), No. 28, *Nähäsè* 22, 1979 EC (28 August 1987), No. 2 *Mäskäräm* 18, 1981 EC (28 September 1988); Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär,"Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Tarik: Kä Eisäma...", p. 51.

Thus, one can argue that as a result of the political and economic influence of the government, the quest for an independent labour movement was aborted. The organization was often forced to primarily serve the political objectives of the government rather than uphold the interests of workers and achieve their aspirations. This made the organization to be considered as one of the agencies of the government in the country.

4.2. Workers' Militia in the Somali-Ethiopian War (1977-78)

Ethiopia's policy towards organized labour has been characterized by the domination of the state and subordination of trade unions. The state dominated the labour relations of the country by devising different controlling mechanisms, most notably labour legislation. The extent of state domination during the military regime went as far as reducing the national trade union into one of its agencies. Though it failed several times, the labour movement on its part often resisted state domination and made several attempts to get out of state control and maintain its independence. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the relation between trade unions and the state had always been hostile; rather there were times when both of them worked together for mutual benefit or the benefit of the country. The Somalia-Ethiopian war can be taken as a case in point when the Ethiopian workers accepted the call of the state to defend the sovereignty of the country.

Since Somalia became an independent republic on 1 July 1960, its leaders began dreaming to uniting all the territories in the Horn of Africa inhabited by the Somalis. The Somali irredentists aspired to incorporate the Ogadèn region from Ethiopia, Mandèra (a district in the North Eastern Province of Kenya) from Britain and Djibouti from France. They orchestrated the Pan-Somali

notion of creating "Greater Somalia" by disregarding the interests of Ethiopia, Britain and France in their respective regions.⁵²

The Somali irredentists invaded the Ogadèn region of Ethiopia for the first time on 22 January 1964. Though the invasion was easily repelled by the Ethiopian army, the border issue was not, however, resolved even after the defeat of the Somalia invasion; rather it continued to be the main cause of tension between Somalia and Ethiopia. It also continued to cause several limited conflicts which eventually led to the outbreak of a full scale war between the two countries from 1977 to 1978.⁵³

During the first invasion of Ethiopia by Somalia, Ethiopian workers, through their organization, CELU, began to express their solidarity with the imperial government by sending a warning letter to the government of Somalia. The executive committee of CELU, together with its Board members and some local trade union leaders from Addis Ababa and its environs went to the palace to show their solidarity to the emperor. In the letter that he read before the emperor, the president of CELU passionately announced that if the Somali army failed to withdraw from the Ethiopian territory, the fifty thousand Ethiopian workers would march to the war front to defend the crown and Ethiopian sovereignty. The letter was highly praised by the emperor and disseminated to the public through the mass media. A copy of it was also sent to President

⁵²David D. Laitin, "The War in the Ogaden: Implications for Siyaad's Role in Somali History," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, March 1979, p. 96, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/159897>; Tefera, *Revolution...*, p. 211; Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1999), p. 99.

⁵³Fantahun Ayele, "The Ethiopian Army: From Victory to Collapse, 1977-1991," PhD Dissertation, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 2009, p. 114. Laitin, p. 96; Tefera, *Revolution...*, p. 211; Tripodi, p. 112; Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2000, p. 637, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3097438>; Mesfin Wolde Mariam, "The Background of the Ethio-Somalian Boundary," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, July 1964, p. 216, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/158818>.

Abdirashid Ali Shermarke of Somalia. Thus, one can argue that even though the letter was more of a manifestation of CELU's subordination to the imperial government, it was used to initiate the Ethiopian workers to make contribution to the war effort. The president of CELU was also elected as a member of the fund raising committee organized by the government to support the people who were affected during the war. The committee was led by *Däjjazmač* Keflè Eregātu, Minister of Interior. After the war was concluded with the victory of the Ethiopian army within a few days, however, the money collected for the war effort was used to construct the airport at Godè, and to improve some of the facilities for the soldiers stationed in this area.⁵⁴

Even though the Somali army was defeated and expelled from Ethiopian territory, the irredentists did not drop the idea of establishing "Greater Somalia". As a result, small scale skirmishes continued to break out along the border of the two countries. This indicated that the Somali government was waiting for another opportune moment to invade Ethiopia and realize its dream. The 1974 Ethiopian revolution and the subsequent instability of the country were taken as the ideal time by Somalia irredentists to realize their dream. More importantly, Mohammed Siad Barre, the president of Somalia, took the year 1977 as the right time to implement "Greater Somalia" as the new military government of Ethiopia under the leadership of Mengistu Haile Mariam was beset by a multitude of internal problems. Besides the creation of deep cracks among the top *Därg* officials internally, the government was fighting against liberation fronts in northern Ethiopia.⁵⁵ True, in its long history, internal problems often had an impact in exposing the country to external attacks.

⁵⁴Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy...*, pp. 81-82.

⁵⁵Fantahun, p. 114; Gebru Tareke "The Ethiopia-Somalia War...", p. 638.

The small scale skirmishes which had been occurring intermittently on the border of the two countries began to be strengthened with the creation of guerrilla groups, the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF) and the Somali Abbo Liberation Front (SALF). They were organized and supported by the Somali government to create chaos in the Ogadèn region. From March 1976 on, these Somali insurgents crossed the border and began to attack Ethiopian military posts and police stations and destabilize the low lying regions of Eastern Ethiopia. They blocked roads and disrupted transport service between Jijjiga and other major garrison towns. Moreover, they ambushed and destroyed both military and civilian vehicles. By early 1977, the security of the region had become totally precarious. The Somali government used the insurgents to create conducive situation to declare a full-scale war on Ethiopia on 12 July 1977.⁵⁶

Threatened by the attacks launched by the Somali insurgents and the imminent full scale invasion of the Somali government, the Ethiopian government began to strengthen its army both in manpower and artillery to defend the sovereignty of the country. On 12 April 1977, Mengistu Haile Mariam addressed the nation on the danger facing the sovereignty of the country. In his speech, Mengistu made a call to the general public commonly known as *Yä Enat Hägär Teri* call of the motherland to take up arms and defend the sovereignty of the country.⁵⁷

The call, sometimes also known as *Yäketät Awaj* (mobilization decree) reverberated among the general public across the country. As the other sections of the society did, the Ethiopian workers

⁵⁶Fantahun, pp. 115-116; Patrick Gilkes, "Revolution and Military Strategy: The Ethiopian Army in the Ogadèn and in Eritrea, 1974-1984," in *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa, April-1-6, 1991* (Addis Ababa University: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1994), p. 722.

⁵⁷Mengistu Haile Mariam, *Teglaçen: Yä Iteyopiya Hezeb Abyotawi Yä Tegel Tarik, Volume I* (Lose Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2004EC/2011), p. 386; Fiqreselassie Wogdres, *Eña ena Abyotu* (Lose Angeles; Addis Ababa: Tsehai Publisher, 2006 EC/2014), p. 368; *Addis Zämän*, *Miyazya* 5, 1969 EC (13 April 1977).

under the leadership of their organization, AETU, expressed their determination to sacrifice their lives for the sovereignty of the country. On the next day of the call, the leaders of AETU, Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) and *qābällè* associations met in Addis Ababa and expressed their solidarity to the government and amongst themselves to work hand in hand and defend the sovereignty of the country. In addition, they vowed to support the war effort with material, manpower and finance. Thus, AETU began to collect material and money from all members of its affiliates and submit to the government starting on 24 April 1977.⁵⁸ In fact, the financial support continued in different forms until the end of the war.

Following the inconclusive end on 26 March 1977 of the Aden peace Conference which was arranged by Fidel Castro, the Cuban president, and Abdul Fatah Ismail, President of South Yemen, to bring peace between Ethiopia and Somalia, Mengistu started preparation to train 300,000 militiamen [though the actual figure at the end did not exceed 120,000] that could repulse the Somali invading force and restore the sovereignty of the country. To this end, a military training camp commonly called *Taṭāq Ṭor Sāfār* (*Taṭāq* Military Camp) was established on 6 *gaša* or 240 hectares of land in the western outskirts of Addis Ababa.⁵⁹ The training camp was named after the horse name of the renowned warrior king of Ethiopia, Tewodros II. This name was selected apparently to invoke patriotism among the general public and enhance the national feeling of the trainees, and initiate them to die for their motherland.

⁵⁸Yā Mälaw İteyopiya Sārātāñoč Mahebār, "Yā İteyopiya Sārātāñoč Tarik: Kā Eisāma...", p. 59.

⁵⁹IES/MS 2907, Mamo Wudneh, "Yā Taṭāq Ṭor Sāfār Māsārātu ena Edegātu," 1970 EC, pp. 3-4. Mengistu Haile Mariam, *Teglačen*: Volume I..., pp. 383-384; Fiqreselassie Wogdres, *Eña ena Abyotu...*, pp. 367-368.

Figure 4.11. *Taṭäq Tor Säfar* (*Taṭäq* Military Training Camp)



Source: Mengistu Hailemariam, *Teglačen Volume I*: p. 388;

The Ethiopian workers, who were contributing a chunk of their monthly salary to the war effort, also began to contribute their skills to the construction of the military camp. A number of carpenters, electricians, plumbers, foremen and engineers from different enterprises accepted the call of the government and AETU, and played an indispensable role during the construction of the camp. Nearly 4,500 workers participated at different stages of the construction from the beginning to the end.⁶⁰

The construction of the military camp was almost completed within a month and hosted recruits from all sections of the society. True, a large number of them came from the peasantry. The first recruits who arrived at the training camp were from Käffa province on 28 April 1977. This was followed by other peasants, workers and urban dwellers from all over the country. After they

⁶⁰Yä Mälaw Itēyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Itēyopiya Säratäñoče Tarik: Kä Eisäma....," pp. 58-59.

took the training for nearly two months, the militia paraded at the revolutionary square on 25 June 1977 and expressed their determination to defend the country from the Somali invaders. During the occasion, the government praised the people's militia as the vanguard of the regular army on which the red army of the revolution would be built up. The militia began to be transported and deployed in the Northern, Eastern and Southern war fronts as of 26 June 1977.⁶¹

Besides contributing their material, skill and salary to the war effort since the declaration of the call of the motherland, the Ethiopian workers also joined *Taṭäq* to get military training and fight for their country. Following the call, AETU made successive discussions and propaganda campaigns among its affiliates and persuaded them to take up arms against the Somalis. Since then, the workers began to shout common slogans: "እያመረትን እንታገለልን እየታገልን እናመርታለን!" and "በመደሻ ምርታችንን በጠብመንጃ ድንበራችንን!"⁶²

In the meantime, AETU held its General Congress from 2 to 5 August 1977 and discussed the overall situations of the country and the type of support that the workers could provide to the government. At the end of the meeting, the General Congress passed a seven point resolution. The resolution urged every basic trade union to recruit manpower as per the criteria set by the government and send to *Taṭäq*, urge the remaining workers to work extra hours without payment and cover the gap that would be created because of the recruited workers, take care of the family of the recruited workers and pay their salary on time, and to defend any anti revolutionary activities in their workplaces and surroundings. It also urged workers to contribute from their

⁶¹IES/MS 2907, Mamo Wudneh, "Yä Taṭäq Ṭor Säfar Mäsärätu ena Edegätu," 1970 EC, pp. 8-10.

⁶²"...We struggle as we produce and we produce as we struggle!"and " We defend our boarder with a rifle, As we produce with a hammer!" See also Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär,"Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Tarik: Kä Eisäma...", p. 61.

salary to the war effort as per the new scale which would come into force as of 7 August 1977. Thus, every worker was bound to contribute from 0.25 cents to 10 birr as per the amount of his/her salary. The money was not fully given to the government; rather it was also used to support the family of the workers militia. The scale was appropriated as follows.

Table 2 -The Scale in which all Workers were bound to Contribute to the War Effort.

Salary in Birr	50 and Below 50	51-250	251-350	351-450	451-600	651-850	850 and Above 850
Expected Contribution	0.25 cents	1 birr	2 birr	3 birr	4 birr	5 birr	10 birr

Source: Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 E.C/2012), p. 218.

Nearly 20, 000 workers were believed to have been recruited from all trade unions organized across the country to take military training at Taṭāq in three rounds. In the first round, workers were recruited through their *qäbällè* without the knowledge of their basic union or industrial union or AETU. Though it seems exaggerated, AETU noted that about 7,000 workers took military training with the peasants and other sections of the society during the first round.⁶³ Their number was apparently reported to AETU by the Ministry of Defence after they reached the war front and began to request their salary. Worthy of mention here is that the salary of workers during the Somalia-Ethiopian war was covered by their former employers, not the government.

In the second round, the recruitment of workers was, however, undertaken through a quota system. Every enterprise was obliged to recruit 5 percent of its manpower.⁶⁴ Most of the

⁶³*Voice of AETU*, Vol. I, No. 1, *Teqmet*, 1970 (October 1977).

⁶⁴ENALA, MoI/ 17.1.1.218.01, A Letter written from Šäläqä Däbäla Dinsa, Chairman of the Addis Ababa Revolutionary Campaign Coordinating Committee to AETU on *Mäskäräm* 9, 1970 EC (19 September 1977). It deals with the precautions that AETU was required to take during recruiting the workers militia.

enterprises fulfilled their quota through a lottery system. But, some enterprise picked only those workers who were interested to take military training and die for their country. In its letter sent to Transport and Communication Industrial Union on 13 July 1977, the Ethiopian Freight Service Organization Workers' Union clearly indicated how it implemented the quota system while recruiting the workers militia as follows. "...ስኔ 10 ቀን 1969 ዓ.ም በማህበር ለተደራጁ ከአብዮታዊ ዘመቻ መምሪያ የወዝአደር ዘማች ከመስሪያቤታችን እንድንመለምል በተፃፈልን ማሳሰቢያ መሰረት/ከመቶ አምስት/ ከ 1300 ሰራተኞች ውስጥ 75 ብቁ ናቸው ብለን ያመንባቸውን ወዛደሮች መርጠን አዘጋጅተናል። ሆኖም ከእነዚህ ውስጥ የሚፈለግብን 65 ሲሆን 10 በተጠባባቂነት እንዲቆዩ አድርገናል።"⁶⁵

During this round, workers were not allowed to be recruited through the *qābällè* where they were residing; rather every worker was obliged to register in his basic union or industrial union or AETU. Moreover, members of the workers' revolutionary defence squads were also recruited during this round.⁶⁶ The revolutionary defence squads were not allowed to be recruited in the first round apparently because the government wanted them to continue their work and stabilize the internal security of the country which was equally dangerous to the government.

It was only those workers who fulfilled the criteria set by the government that were recruited and registered by AETU, and joined Taṭāq for military training. The second round recruits began to enter Taṭāq military camp on 12 August 1977 and the training was started at the end of the same

⁶⁵"...Based on the notice that the Revolutionary Campaign Office wrote to our office on 10 June 1977 concerning on how to recruit workers' militia, we recruited 75 workers whom we believe are well qualified out of 1300 employees on the 5percent basis. But, since we are expected to send only about 65 persons, we keep the remaining 10 as reserve. See also CETU, Box No. 133, File No. OT7, A letter sent from Ethiopian Freight Service Organization Workers' Union to Transport and Communication Industrial Union, *Hämlè* 6, 1969 EC (13 July 1977); *Addis Zämān, Mäskärām* 10, 1970 EC (20 September 1977); *Addis Zämān, Mäskärām* 11, 1970 EC (21 September 1977).

⁶⁶*Addis Zämān, Mäskärām* 10, 1970 EC (20 September 1977); *Addis Zämān, Mäskärām* 11, 1970 EC (21 September 1977).

month. They were recruited from all enterprises across the country. It was also in this round that nearly 10,000 workers joined the training.⁶⁷ The Ethiopian Amharic daily newspaper reported this on its 14 August 1977 edition as: "...የአብዮታዊ ኢትዮጵያን ዳር ድንበር ለማስከበርና የሰፊውን ጭቁን ህዝብ አብዮት ለመጠበቅ በግንባር ቀደምትነት ለመዝመት በርከት ያሉ የመጀመሪያዎቹ የወዛደሩ ህዝባዊ ሠራዊት ምልምሎች [የመጀመሪያዎቹ ሲል በወዛደር ስም ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ የተመለመሉ ለማለት ነው] ባለፈው ዓርብና ቅዳሜ ታጠቅ ጦር ሰፈር ገብተዋል።"⁶⁸

The workers were organized under two workers militia brigades. These were 100th and 101st. They took the training at Taṭāq for nearly two months. At the beginning of October 1977, the two brigades went out of Taṭāq and were deployed in different fronts. The 100th worker's militia brigade was put under the 1st Division or Central Division and deployed along the Addis Ababa-Assāb road to clear out insurgents who were creating havoc behind the Ethiopian defence lines and to protect roads, bridges and the railway line from sabotage. It used Awaš Sābat Killo as its headquarters. As soon as it reached the area, it faced sudden attacks from the Somali insurgents at Afdām and Bekiè on 15 and 16 October 1977 respectively. But, the brigade defeated the insurgents and brought the area under its control until it was incorporated into the 117th Division and left the area for Eritrea to participate on the Red Star Campaign of 1982.⁶⁹ True, since the Addis Ababa-Assab road was very significant to transport arms and other military equipment from the port to Addis Ababa during the war, the government deployed the brigade at various points, mainly from Awaš to Assāb, and made the security of the road safe for transportation. Thus, the 100th worker's militia brigade played an indispensable role in this regard.

⁶⁷Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratāñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratāñoče Tarik: Kā Eisāma...", p. 70; Educational and Information Department of All Ethiopian Trade union, *May Day 1978* (Addis Ababa, 1978), pp.19-20.

⁶⁸"...The first batch of the workers militia recruits [the first batch refers to those militias recruited for the first time in the name of labourer] joined Taṭāq military training camp last Friday and Saturday [6 and 7 August 1977] in large number to march in the forefront and defend the revolution of the broad oppressed masses and protect the border of revolutionary Ethiopia." See also *Addis Zāmān*, *Nähäsè* 8, 1969 EC (14 August 1977).

⁶⁹Informants: Gänät Mäläsä and Alämu Yasin

The 101st workers militia brigade, however, fought not only against the Somali insurgents but also against its regular army. It left Taṭāq for Dire Dawa on 15 October 1977 and joined the 2nd People's Militia Division. It was, however, transferred to Babilè after two weeks and joined the 5th people's militia division to strengthen the Ethiopian army defence line. Since the brigade was equipped with a new rifle, K-47 which was not used during the training, it used the two weeks to get acquainted with the machine gun with the help of their veteran commanders. Though it faced some attacks from the Somali insurgents on its way from Dire Dawa to Babilè, it reached the area without any significant causality.⁷⁰

Even though there is no consensus among scholars who wrote on the Somalia-Ethiopian war concerning the exact date when Somalia launched its full scale invasion on Ethiopia, they all agreed that it was undertaken in the second week of July 1977.⁷¹ Fantahun Ayälä, who consulted the archives of the Ministry of Defence, however, disregarded other assumptions and definitively argued that it was launched on 12 July 1977.⁷² Be that as it may, within a matter of 3 to 4 weeks of the beginning of the full scale invasion, the Somali army, which was well armed and numerically superior, easily defeated the Ethiopian army and penetrated 700 kms deep into southeastern and 300kms into southern Ethiopia.⁷³

The 101th worker's militia brigade reached at Babillè on 1 November 1977 nearly two months after the fall of Jijiga and Karra Mara into the hands of the Somalis. Though the Somali army failed to advance beyond Karra Mara because of the stiff resistance of the Ethiopian army at

⁷⁰Informants: Dämes Bongär and Ahmäd Mohammäd

⁷¹Gilkes, p.724; Gebru, p. 644.

⁷²Fantahun, p.119.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 122; Clapham, *Transformation...*, pp.61-62.

Qorè, it continued to launch its attack through Fädis, Babile and Jarso-Kombolča fronts. The Babillè front was mainly opened to cut off the Harär-Qorè route and block any further support that could come from Harär for the Ethiopian army at the Qorè defence line.⁷⁴

The Somali army began to launch its attack on the Babilè front on 12 November 1977. Despite the stiff resistance it encountered from the 68th, 91st and 94th militia brigades, 101st worker's militia brigade, 4th tank battalion, 013 veteran battalion and other units of the Ethiopian army, it managed to control some strategic points. The defeat was attributed to sabotage by members of the EPRP. Some EPRP members who were also accused of killing some junior commanders were executed in front of the army. Nevertheless, the Ethiopian army launched a counter offensive on the Somali army and controlled Abu Šärif, a strategic place between Babillè and Fiq towns.⁷⁵

The execution of some of the radio operators who created miscommunication between brigade and battalion commanders in the first engagement contributed a lot to the success of the counter offensive. Three radio operators of the worker's militia brigade were suspected of being EPRP members and summarily executed.⁷⁶ Moreover, the families of the executed militia were immediately deprived of the salary and other benefits of the deceased. In his letter to all enterprises where the 21 executed militias were recruited, Pètros Kälklè, the vice president of AETU, ordered them to stop paying the salary of the deceased and other benefits to his/her family. This was a double jeopardy. The letter which was written to the Ethiopian Airline reads as follows:

⁷⁴Informants: Dämes Bongär and Ahmäd Mohammäd

⁷⁵Gebbru, p. 654; Informants: Dämes Bongär and Ahmäd Mohammäd.

⁷⁶Informants: Dämes Bongär and Ahmäd Mohammäd.

...ከድርጅታችሁ ሀቀኛ በመምሰል ተመልምሎ የእናት ሀገሬን ዳር ድንበር አስከብራለሁ በማለት የበግ ለምድ ለብሶ ዘምቶ የነበረው የአሸን ቁጥር 447067 ወዛደር ማሙዬ ብዙኑህ አብዮታዊ እርምጃ ከተወሰደባቸው ፀረ አብዮተኞች አንዱ ስለሆነ ከላይ ተብራርቶ በተገለፀው መሰረት ከድርጅቱ ይከፈለው የነበረ ደግዝም ሆነ ማናቸውም ልዩ ልዩ ጥቅሞች እንዳይሰጡት ታደርጉ ዘንድ አብዮታዊ ትብብራችሁን አጥብቀን እንጠይቃለን።⁷⁷

...Labourer Mamuyè Bezunäh who was recruited from your organization to defend his mother land with service number 447067 was found to be one of the anti revolutionaries on whom revolutionary measure was taken. We, thus, firmly request your revolutionary cooperation to revoke his salary and other benefits that he had been receiving from your organization.

In fact, the cleansing of EPRP members who were allegedly labeled as "fifth columnist" by the *Därg* and top army officers was started at the Qorè defence line a day after the fall of Jijjiga and Karra Mara to the Somalis on 12 September 1977 and continued to be practiced at different fronts until the end of the war. A number of EPRP members who were implicated in the retreat of the army were summarily executed on 13 September 1977. A dozen officers were also executed by firing squad for conspiring with the "anarchists" (EPRP) on the same day. This measure helped the commanders not only to clear out the fifth columnists but also to maintain discipline among the ill-trained and inexperienced people's militia.⁷⁸

Even though the balance of the war began to shift in favor of Ethiopia with the arrival of the Soviet arms and the South Yemeni tank units in late October 1977, the Ethiopian army began its full scale counter offensive on 23 January 1978. The coming of around 1500 Soviet military advisers under the leadership of General Vasily Ivanovich Petro, Deputy Commander of the Soviet Ground Forces, and more than 12,000 Cuban combatants with their own military hardware under the leadership of General Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez strengthened the preparation of the

⁷⁷CELU, Box No. __, File No. 271, A letter written from Pètros Käklè, the vice president of AETU to all enterprises from which the executed militia was recruited on *Teqmet* 6,1971 EC (16 October 1978). It deals about revoking the right of the executed militia.

⁷⁸Gebre, p. 650; Fantahun, p. 126.

Ethiopian army for the counter offensive. In late January 1978, the Ethiopian army was in the final stage of its preparation to launch the counter offensive. The operation was painstakingly planned by the Supreme Military Strategic Committee (SMSC). It was composed of the Ethiopian Officers and Soviet and Cuban military advisers. It was planned to apply surprise massive artillery barrages followed by infantry and mechanized attacks on the enemy. Nevertheless, the Somali army started its attack on Babilè in a bid to take over Harar on 22 January 1978. On the next day, the Ethiopian army began to implement its full scale counter offensive against the enemy on several fronts.⁷⁹

The Ethiopian workers who joined Taṭṭāq for the third round around mid November 1977 completed their training and left for the various war fronts in late January when the Ethiopian army was getting ready to launch its counter offensive. Nearly 3, 000 workers participated in the third round training. At the end of the training, they were organized in mixed brigades with peasant militia, revolutionary guard and veterans, and deployed in various fronts as a rearguard. The revolutionary people's militias mixed brigades were 504th, 505th and 506th. While 504th and 505th mixed brigades were put under the eastern command in the 9th and 10th divisions respectively, the 506th was put under the southern command in the 4th division. They were deployed as a rearguard to control the liberated areas.⁸⁰ The coming of these mixed brigades further consolidated not only the number and strength of the army but also the security of the country.

⁷⁹Gebbru, pp. 656-657; Fantahun, pp. 130-132; Gilkes, p. 725

⁸⁰CELU, Box No. __, File No. 271, Yä 504, 505 and 506 Ṭemer bergèdoč sem zerzer kä 1969 eskä1975 EC; Informant: Näjid Šekur.

The Ethiopian regular army and militia units were reorganized into seven infantry divisions. It was also named as the First Revolutionary Liberation Army (FRLA). Accordingly, the worker's militia brigade was put under the 8th infantry division. It was this division that, with the help of the Cuban artillery battalion and BM battery, saved Babilè and pushed the Somalis a few kilometers away from the town. The various units of the 8th division including the worker's militia brigade cleared the Babilè- Fiq road and controlled the town of Fiq on 8 March 1978. The division also pushed further into the heart of Ogadèn and controlled smaller towns in the next two days.⁸¹ On 14 March 1978, the division entered Qäbri Dähar with the help of the 3rd par commando. Thereafter, the town began to be used as the headquarters of the division. The worker's militia brigade subsequently participated with the units of the division in the liberation of Godè, Wardèr and Qälafo.⁸²

The control of Jijjiga by the Ethiopian army and the Cuban troops on 5 March 1978 marked the culmination of the Somali Ethiopian war. Thereafter, the Somalis were on the run and a number of smaller towns fell into the hands of the Ethiopian army without any major engagements. Dägahabur was also liberated on 8 March 1978.⁸³ Regardless of the declaration of victory by the Ethiopian government after the control of Jijjiga, border towns such as Gäladin, Šilabo, Mustahil, Fèrfèr and other areas remained under the control of the Somalis until 1980.⁸⁴ The control of these border towns was mainly undertaken by the 8th division in the *Laš* Operation. The worker's militia brigade also participated in the liberation of those border towns. The brigade remained under the division until it was later combined with the regular army. True, a number of

⁸¹Dämes Bongär and Ahmäd Mohammäd.; Fantahun, p. 136.

⁸²Dämes Bongär and Ahmäd Mohammäd.; Fantahun, p. 138.

⁸³Fantahun, p.137; Gebru, p.659.

⁸⁴Gebru, p. 660; Fantahun, p.139.

workers left the brigade for several reasons and only those who were fit continued to serve in the regular army.⁸⁵

The other thing worth mentioning here is that it was not only workers who took military training at Taṭāq and were organized into brigades and battalions to defend the sovereignty of the country; rather there were also armed and unarmed workers who participated in the war and paid the ultimate price for their country. The workers of Dire Dawa factory workers can be mentioned in this regard. Being aware of the strategic importance of Dire Dawa, the Somali Army launched two major attacks to control the town on 16 July 1977 and 16 August 1977. While the first attack was repulsed without any significant damage to the town, the second attack, however, virtually destroyed the major facilities of the town. For instance, the Somali army destroyed the air traffic control tower at the airport and the fuel depot, and bombarded textile, meat and cement factories. They terrorized the residents and nearly came to control the town. But, the Ethiopian air force, which had relocated to Däbrä Zäyt, tilted the balance of the war in favor of the Ethiopians by destroying the Somali tanks and saved the town.⁸⁶

It was at this difficult time that the workers of Dire Dawa textile factory played indispensable role to the Ethiopian army by evacuating wounded soldiers and providing supplies. Moreover, the revolutionary defense squad of the factory fought against the Somalis who tried to control the compound of the factory and paid the ultimate price for their country. Zārgi Häylä Maryam can

⁸⁵Informants: Dämes Bongär and Ahmäd Mohammäd

⁸⁶Informants: Tadässä Amarä; Negusè Lämman and Kābādä Duguma; Fantahun, pp. 122-123.

be mentioned in this regard. She died in the compound of the factory while fighting against the Somalis.⁸⁷

In general, the Ethiopian workers played an indispensable role in defeating the Somali army. The Ethiopian workers participated in the Somali-Ethiopian war not only as combatants but also as technicians, mechanics and drivers. Though the war was initially fought between the Somali irredentists who were dreaming to establish "Greater Somalia" and the Ethiopian nationalist government and people who were determined not to relinquish even an inch of land, it eventually evolved into a struggle between internationalism and irredentism following the coming of the Soviet military advisers and the Cuban and South Yemeni combatants on the Ethiopian side. In addition to their national interest, the three countries gave support to Ethiopia apparently in the spirit of socialist solidarity. At the end of the war, the *Därg* saw it as part of the international proletarian struggle. Regarding this, Gebru Tareke, who consulted the communiqué that Mengistu wrote to praise the Eastern Command for their contributions, argued that the *Därg* gave the credit of the victory not only to the Ethiopian people but also to the workers of the world.⁸⁸

In his book, *Teglaçen: Yä Iteyopiya Hezeb Abyotawi Yä Tegel Tarik*, Mengistu also made a similar argument: "...ያሸነፉቸው እነርሱ በትክክል ያልተረዱት የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝብ አብዮት ነው።"⁸⁹ Here Mengistu tried to indicate that the Ethiopian revolution not only galvanized the oppressed masses of Ethiopia to fight against the Somali irredentists but also it carried out its defensive war as part of the struggle

⁸⁷Dire Dawa Textile Factory Workers' Union, *Dire Dawa Factory Workers' Day* (Harär: Harär Printing LTD, 1980EC/1988), p.17.

⁸⁸Gebru, p. 659.

⁸⁹"...It was the Ethiopian people's revolution on which they [the Somalis] did not have a clear understanding that defeated them". See also Mengistu, p. 486.

of proletarian internationalism that brought socialist countries to fight on its side and score a resounding victory over the Somalis. The deployment of worker's militia brigades in the war was also apparently made to push the war to the level that it could be considered as a part of the struggle of the international proletariat and get the support of socialist countries across the world. Thus, one can argue that, since the proletarian ideology was at the center of their politics and proletarian internationalism was the *modus operandi* of their communist parties, it is possible to argue that the intervention of the Soviet, Cuban and South Yemeni governments during the Somali-Ethiopia war was part of the struggle of the international proletariat. In addition, though the Workers' Party of Ethiopia was still in the process of formation, the defensive war that the *Därg* was fighting to keep the sovereignty and independence of socialist Ethiopia was in complete harmony with the requirements of proletarian internationalism. Also worth mentioning here is that, regardless of the nature of the struggle they were in, the Ethiopian workers played an indispensable role in the victory that Ethiopia scored over the Somalis during the Somalia-Ethiopian war.

4.3. Proletarian Internationalism and the Observance of May Day in Ethiopia:

A Shift in Trade Unions' Foreign Relations

Proletarian internationalism has been considered as a fundamental concept of socialism and communism since the days of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, even though the joining of the two words, proletariat and international, as proletarian internationalism was started after the First World War (WWI)⁹⁰. The concept of proletarian internationalism was, however, first reflected in

⁹⁰Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labour History* (Leiden; Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), p. 259.

The Communist Manifesto, an important document that announced the tenets of communism in 1848. In the concluding remark of the document, "Working men of all Countries, Unite!", Marx and Engels sought to create awareness among the workers of the world regarding the importance of unity to defeat their oppressors, the bourgeoisie. They argued that the victory of proletarians over their oppressors at the national level was not enough so long as proletarians across the world were still under oppression. Thus, they further stressed that the international aggressive expansion of capitalism forced the workers of the world to unite and confront this international challenge. They also noted that the interest of workers could be better served through cooperation with the international proletariat, not with the national bourgeoisie.⁹¹

The concept of proletariat internationalism emanated from the Marxist analysis of capitalism. Marxists believed that cooperation among the working class of the world should be seen as a precondition to fight against capitalism. They also encouraged the proletariat across the world to strengthen their solidarity and defend themselves from the merciless exploitation of the bourgeoisie. Marcel van der Linden defined proletarian internationalism as "...the collective actions of a group of workers in one country who set aside their short-term interests as a national group on behalf of a group of workers in another country, in order to promote their long-term interests as members of a trans-national class."⁹²

Even though the working class struggle in Western Europe had sought international solidarity since the early 19th century, it was not able to establish an agency that would protect the proletariat across the world from the exploitation of the bourgeoisie until 1864. Nevertheless,

⁹¹Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Authorized English Translation, edited and annotated by Frederick Engels (New York: International Publishers, 2007), p. 44.

⁹²Linden, p. 259.

the working class struggle to establish an international agency was intensified with the outbreak of the 1848 revolution across Europe. As a result, several organizations with multinational membership were created in Belgium and England and began to finance the working class movement in Europe.⁹³ It was from this movement that the International Working Men's Association (IWMA), commonly called the First International, was born in London on 28 September 1864. It aimed at coordinating the working class struggle against their oppressors, the bourgeoisie, across the world. Nevertheless, the First International began to decline after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1872 and eventually ceased to exist in 1876. The preoccupation of national trade unions on their internal matters was believed to have been one of the factors for the decline of the First International.⁹⁴ Despite its failure, the First International contributed a lot to the global unification of the class struggle of the working class of the world against their common enemy, capitalism.

After the demise of the First International, the proletariats of the world continued their struggle to consolidate their solidarity. The working class struggle, augmented by the newly emerging socialist cooperation, eventually led to the creation of the Second International in Paris on 14 July 1889. It was also called Socialist International as it was initiated by socialist and labour parties across Europe. As compared to the First International, the Second International was a broad organization that managed to encompass a number of working class movements across the world. It was also more decentralized than its precursor.⁹⁵

⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁹⁴Linden, p. 272; Robert Bozinoviski, "The Communist Party of Australia and Proletarian Internationalism, 1928-1945,) PhD Dissertation, Victoria University: Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development, 2008, p. 24.

⁹⁵Linden, pp. 273-274; Bozinoviski, pp. 23-24.

The declaration of May First or May Day as the holiday of the working people of the world or an international workers' day on 14 July 1889 was one of the major achievements of the Second International. It was an event that aroused the expectancy of the working people throughout the world. The other major issue that the Congress of the Second International decided and officially recognized was the 8 hour working day which was the rallying cause of May Day.⁹⁶ It was Samuel Gompers, President of the America Federation of Labour (AFL), who suggested to the participants of the Second International to transform May Day, which was already appropriated as a rallying day for the 8 hour working day among the American working class since 1886, into an international labour day to be celebrated by all workers across the world.⁹⁷ Thus, May Day was not a socialist invention; rather it was introduced as a result of the long and arduous struggle of the American working class for the 8 hour working day.⁹⁸

Though May Day arose from the 8 hour working day movement, it eventually became a day of solidarity, struggle and unity of the international proletariat. It is a day in which the international proletariat and the world's oppressed peoples analyze and recall their past struggles and sacrifices. It is also a day in which the workers assess the stage their struggle has reached and map out their next strategies and tactics both at the national and international levels. The slogans were also transformed from demanding for shorter work days to economic equality, democracy, individual right, green environment and a more humane world.⁹⁹

⁹⁶William Z. Foster, *History of the Three Internationals* (New York: International Publishers, 1955), p. 199.

⁹⁷David Goldway, "Neglected Page of History: The Story of May Day: A Talk Sponsored by the Friends of the Wellfleet Public Library, Wellfleet, Massachusetts, May, 1989," *Science & Society*, Vol. 69, No. 2, April, 2005, p. 223, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40404819>.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁹⁹Goldway, p. 224.

Even though Ethiopia had been a member of the International Labour Organization (ILO) since 1923 and established the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU) in 1963, it had never celebrated May Day before 1975. Since some of the Ethiopian rulers were shareholders in some of the biggest companies in the country, they often preferred to support the agenda of the employers than those of the workers. Moreover, CELU had never demanded the government to make May Day one of the national holidays. It had merely attempted to observe the day by arranging for its General Congress to be held on May first. In general, one can argue that neither the workers nor the imperial regime recognized the importance of the day before 1975.¹⁰⁰

Though May Day had begun to be celebrated at the world stage since 1886, the Ethiopian workers and their organization began to observe it nearly 89 years later in 1975. It was the *Därg* regime that declared May Day to be celebrated as one of the national holidays in the country on 10 January 1975.¹⁰¹ Though the celebration of May Day had never been demanded by the workers until it was announced by the government, Kiflu Tadesse noted that the issue was raised in the *Voice of Labour* a few days before the *Därg* announced it. He further asserted that it was from that paper that the *Därg* took the idea and declared it officially.¹⁰² Nevertheless, since the paper that contained issues concerning May Day was barred from being published by the social committee of the *Därg*, it is very difficult to verify that the idea was initiated by CELU.

On the other hand, the *Därg* argued that ever since Ethiopia adopted socialism as a political and socio-economic system, it became one of the socialist countries in the world. Thus, it further

¹⁰⁰Informants: Beyene Solomon, Gäbrä Selasè Gäbrä Maryam, Abära Abäbä, Fesseha Şeyon Tākè.

¹⁰¹*Addis Zämän*, 7er 3, 1967 EC (11 January, 1975).

¹⁰²Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, Part I, From the Early Beginnings to 1975* (Washington DC: Independent Publishers, 1993), pp. 220-221.

argued that since many socialist countries celebrated May Day as one of the manifestations of their grand principle, proletarian internationalism, it was also a must for Ethiopia to celebrate May Day and join the camp.¹⁰³ It is, thus, feasible to argue that the celebration of May Day was initiated by the *Därg* and not by the workers themselves. It reached to this decision apparently to get the support of the Ethiopian workers and improve its relation with the national confederation, as well as to strengthen its relations with the socialist countries. In addition, by celebrating May Day, the *Därg* tried to prove to those countries that Ethiopia was building socialism and aspiring towards communism.

Regardless of the intention of the *Därg* behind the celebration of May Day, CELU welcomed it and expressed its readiness to celebrate the day with great zeal and in a progressive socialist spirit. In its message to the PMAC, CELU noted that: "...የጊዜያዊ ወታደራዊ መንግስት ጥር 2 ቀን 1967 ዓ.ም በሰጠው መግለጫ እ.ኤ.አ ግንቦት 1 ቀን ዓለም አቀፍ የሰራተኞች ቀን በኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ በዓል ሆኖ እንዲከበር መወሰኑን የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች አንድነት ማህበር በሙሉ ልብ ይደግፋል።"¹⁰⁴ A number of basic trade unions also expressed their gratitude to the PMAC regarding the celebration of May Day. The Ethiopian Airlines Workers' Union, for instance, welcomed the decision of PMAC to designate May Day as national holiday on 10 January 1975. In a congratulatory message to the PMAC, the EAL workers' union expressed its support of the government's decision on the celebration of May Day.¹⁰⁵

The celebration of May Day for the first time in the history of Ethiopia was organized by several stakeholders, including the Ministry of Social and Labour Affairs, Ministry of National

¹⁰³ *Addis Zāmān*, *ፒር* 3, 1967 EC (11 January, 1975); Ethiopian Herald, 11 January 1975 (*ፒር* 3, 1967 EC).

¹⁰⁴ "...CELU supports wholeheartedly the decision that the PMAC made on 10 January 1975 to celebrate May Day or May First as one of the national holydays of the country." See also *Addis Zāmān*, *ፒር* 7, 1967 EC (15 January 1975).

¹⁰⁵ Ethiopian Herald, 12 January 1975 (*ፒር* 4, 1967EC).

Resources, Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions and Addis Ababa Municipality. It was started on 30 April 1975 in the afternoon with musical shows presented by military bands at major squares across Addis Ababa. Among others, the Ground Force Orchestra, the Imperial Body Guard Orchestra, the Police Orchestra and the Municipality Orchestra participated in the show. On 1 May 1975, a number of workers from trade unions in and around Addis Ababa marched to the Revolution Square from four directions. A number of government officials, ministers, military officers, ambassadors and other dignitaries including the chairman of the PMAC and the vice-chairmen attended the celebration as guests of honor.¹⁰⁶

On the occasion, the chairman of the *Därg*, Brigadier General Täfäri Bānti, congratulated the workers and praised them for the indispensable role they played during the revolution. Moreover, he encouraged the workers to value the principles of socialism and defend the revolution from both its internal and external enemies. The first vice president of CELU also made a speech on the event. In his speech, Alām Abdi appreciated the political decisions of the *Därg* to bring all the resources and means of productions under the control of the general public. He also expressed succinctly that the Ethiopian workers were ready to struggle against the remnants of feudalism and imperialism and work for the development of socialism. In addition, he hailed May Day as the birthday of all workers and called on them to stop celebrating the birthday of Emperor Haile Selassie I and begin celebrating their own birthday.¹⁰⁷

Even though the leaders of CELU were arrested and a serious division was created between the vice president, Alām Abdi, and his supporters who were backed by the *Därg* on the one hand and

¹⁰⁶ *Addis Zāmān*, *Miyazeya* 22, 1967 EC (30 April 1975); *Mäskärām* (A Marxist-Leninist Ideological Journal), Vol. 1, No. 4, *Miyazeya*, 1973 EC/1981, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ *Addis Zāmān*, *Miyazeya* 23, 1967 EC/1 May 1975.

the leaders of some basic trade unions in and around Addis Ababa who were trying to establish a provisional leadership for the confederation on the other, thousands of workers participated in the May Day celebration. The *Därg* was able to bring the two conflicting groups together and celebrate the day colorfully. The workers who came with their industrial products added color to the occasion.¹⁰⁸ Thousands of workers and other sections of the popular masses marched to the Revolution Square shouting slogans and hoisting up placards reading: “Down with Alām Abdi!” “CELU shall be independent!” “Provisional Peoples' Government now!” and “Democratic Rights must be respected!”¹⁰⁹ True, they also shouted or hoisted on their placards anti-feudal and anti-imperialist as well as pro-socialist slogans.¹¹⁰ Despite the various anti government slogans shouted and hoisted on placards, however, the celebration was concluded peacefully.

Figure 4.12. Industrial Workers from the Southern Sub City Administration of Addis Ababa Marching to the Revolution Square



Source: *Addis Zāmān*, *Miyazya* 23, 1967EC (1 May 1975); *Goh Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 7, *Sānè* 1967 EC (June, 1975), p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ *Goh Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 7, *Sānè* 1967 EC (June 1975), p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ IES/CL, 2393/04/2/2.3, *Abyot*, Vol. 1 No. 4, April-May 1976, p. 22. Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: ...Part I*, pp. 220-221.

¹¹⁰ *Addis Zāmān*, *Miyazeya*, 23, 1967 EC (May 1, 1975).

The 1976 and 1977 May Day celebrations were, however, marred by clashes that broke out between *Därg* and POMOA loyalist on the one hand and EPRP and EWRU followers on the other. May Day was used as an important event by the two contending groups to flex their muscles by bringing as many of their supporters as possible to the rallies and making them disseminate their political manifestos by shouting slogans and hoisting them on their placards. Instead of being a day in which the workers themselves celebrate their victory, voice their grievances and demands, strengthen their solidarity and reaffirm their dedication to continue the struggle, the celebration of May Day during those years was used as an event in which workers were forced to echo the propaganda of the contradicting groups. In effect, it served as a battleground for the two contending groups, EPRP and *Meison*.¹¹¹

A week before the celebration of the 1976 May Day, most of the *Därg* officials went to several industries in and around Addis Ababa which were suspected as strongholds of the EPRP and held discussions with workers on how to celebrate the day peacefully. They urged workers to refrain from participating in activities that would disrupt the peace and tranquility of May Day. They also advised them to come out with anti-CELU and anti-EPRP slogans.¹¹² In this regard, Fessehā Dästa, for instance, stated in his memoirs that he held discussion with the workers of Berhanena Sälam Printing Press, Ethio-Djibouti Railway Company and the Ministry of Mining and Energy. He argued that the government used the discussions to gauge the attitude of workers before the celebration and set corrective measures to control the problems which would be created on May Day. He further argued that despite the preparation of the government to hold a

¹¹¹IES/CL, 2393/04/2/4.4, *Abyot*, Vol.5, No.4, May 1980, pp. 7-8; *Mäskäräm*, Vol. 1, No.4, *Miyazeya*, 1973 EC/1981, p. 19; Andargachew Tiruneh, p. 211.

¹¹²IES/CL, 2393/04/2/2.3, *Abyot*, Vol. 1, No. 4, April-May, 1976, p. 23; IES/CL, 2393/04/2/2.4, *Abyot*, Vol. 1, No. 5, June-July, 1976, p.1.

peaceful May Day celebration, EPRP members managed to reach Revolution Square and disrupted the celebration not only by shouting and hoisting on their placards anti-*Därg* slogans but also by firing guns¹¹³ Though the author gave due attention to the situation, he belittled the repressions of workers by the regime and unfairly attributed the whole problem to the EPRP.

Besides intimidating radical workers who raised questions during the discussions, the *Därg* planned to snatch anti-government placards from workers before they got out of their starting points. A large number of soldiers and police forces were deployed along the main roads that led to Revolution Square and snatched placards and apprehended workers who were suspected as EPRP members. Regardless of the security pressure, the workers showed their determination by condemning the regime. In one of its clandestine papers, the EPRP noted that: "...በማስፈራሪያቸውና በማንኛውም መንገድ ላባደሩ፣ ደግሞ ሌላው ጭቁን ህዝብ እንደማይመለስ ሲያውቁ ዕለቱን የወታደርና የጦር መሳሪያ ትሪት ማሳያ አድርገውት ዋሉ።"¹¹⁴ Despite the security personnel's pressure, however, a number of workers reached Revolution Square shouting and hoisting anti *Därg* slogans. They demanded respect of democratic rights and raised other wide ranging issues.¹¹⁵

...የአዲስ አበባና የአካባቢው ላባደሩ፣ ወጣትና ሌላው ህዝብ ይዟቸው ከወጣቸው መፈክሮች መካከል፡ ጊዜያዊ ህዝባዊ መንግስት ይቋቋም! ኢህአፓ የላባደሩ ፓርቲ ነው! ጭቁን ህዝብ በኤርትራ ላይ አይዘምትም! ባንዳ መሀራን ይወደሙ! በኢሰአማ ላይ የመንግስት ተፅኖ ይቋም! የላባደሩ ዝቅተኛ ደሞዝ ይወሰን! በሰራተኛው ላይ የታወጀው የባርነት አዋጅ ይወገድ! የሚሉት ደመቅ ብለው የሚታዩ እና በሩቁ የሚሰሙ ነበሩ።¹¹⁶

...Among the slogans that the workers, youths and other people of Addis Ababa and its surrounding shouted and hoisted on their placards, the ones conspicuously seen and loudly heard at a distance include: Let Provisional People's Government be established! EPRP is the vanguard party of the workers! The oppressed mass shall never campaign on Eritrea! Down with the comprador scholars! Stop

¹¹³Fesseha Dsta, *Abyoyu ena Tezetayè* (Los Angeles; Addis Ababa: Tsehai Publisher, 2008), p. 184.

¹¹⁴"...When the intimidation of the *Därg* against workers failed, it brought the army and heavy machine guns and made May Day a military show up." See also IES/CL, 1775/02/31, ላ ብ አ ደ ር , ሜ ደ ደ እ ን ዴ ት አ ለ ፈ ?

¹¹⁵Babile Tola, *To Kill a Generation: The Red Terror in Ethiopia* (Washington, DC: Free Ethiopia Press, 1989), p. 43; IES/CL, 2393/04/2/4.4, *Abyot*, Vol.5, No.4, May, 1980, pp. 7-8.

¹¹⁶IES/CL, 1775/02/31, ላ ብ አ ደ ር , ሜ ደ ደ እ ን ዴ ት አ ለ ፈ ?

government's intervention on CELU! Let the minimum wage be decided! Let the slavery law proclaimed on workers [Proclamation No. 64/1975] be dissolved!

Even though the May Day celebration took place in several provincial towns, it was only in Addis Ababa that the deadly clash between the demonstrators and government soldiers broke out. In all cities and towns across the country, the soldiers and police force attacked and arrested suspected opponents. In Addis Ababa, however, they shot and killed a number of demonstrators. The number of casualties was not clearly known as prisoners were also killed later. Andargachew Tiruneh, however, argued that around 20 people were killed during the demonstration. But, Babile Tola doubled the figure and argued that more than 40 people were killed during the 1976 May Day demonstration.¹¹⁷ In general, one can argue that whatever the number of casualties, the 1976 May Day marked the transformation of trade unions-state relation from a mere contradiction into serious animosity.

The 1977 May Day was celebrated after the labour movement of the country had come under strict state control. The *Därg* had already clipped EWRU, the labour wing of EPRP, during the comprehensive house to house search campaign conducted from 23 to 27 March 1977. A number of workers who were suspected as EPRP members were also exposed and apprehended in several industries. As a result, EPRP had already been losing its control on trade unions before the May Day celebration.¹¹⁸

In addition to the war of total annihilation waged on EPRP and EWRU by the *Därg* and *Mieson*, internal division among the leaders of the party weakened it greatly which forced it to abandon

¹¹⁷Babile, p. 43; *Abyot*, Vol. I, No. 5, June-July, 1976, p. 3; *Abyot*, Vol. I, No. 4 April-May, 1976, It deals about May Day celebration in Addis Ababa.

¹¹⁸*Mäskäräm* (A Marxist-Leninist Ideology Journal), Vol. I, No. 4, 1973 EC/1981, p. 19.

conducting protest demonstrations during major celebrations. It was forced to carry out only small scale rallies at the *qäbällè* levels. Thus, EPRP and some members of the defunct EWRU agreed to carry out small scale rallies in several *qäbällès* of Addis Ababa on the eve of May Day. The responsibility of executing the rallies at each *qäbällè* was given to the Addis Ababa Youth League.¹¹⁹

The Youth League organized the protest demonstrations in each *qäbällè* on 29 April 1977 apparently to avoid similar casualties that had happened in previous year May Day celebration. By six o'clock on Friday evening, hundreds of youth and children went out for demonstration in more than 20 *qäbällès*. Even though EPRP had the information that the *Därg* had already obtained the plan of the demonstration, it could not disseminate the information to the demonstrators and stop the demonstration.¹²⁰ Jacob Wiebel argued that the *Därg* obtained the information from a mid-level EPRP member who was apprehended at *qäbällè* level.¹²¹

Once the *Därg* received the information, it put the revolutionary defense squads and the soldiers on alert to respond to the demonstrators. Thus, as soon as the demonstrators reached around the *qäbällè* offices, the revolutionary defence squads supported by soldiers in military jeeps opened fire on them. By doing so, they committed a horrifying massacre on young children and youths. Well over five hundred demonstrators were slain in less than two hours. A number of youths were also apprehended and later killed. The massacre continued the following day across the

¹¹⁹Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation:...Part II*, p. 316; Babile, pp. 141-142.

¹²⁰Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation:...Part II*, pp. 316-317.

¹²¹Jacob Wiebel, "Revolutionary Terror Campaigns in Addis Ababa, 1976-1978," PhD Dissertation, University of Oxford: St. Cross College, 2014, p. 159.

city. The families who lost their sons and daughters during the heinous massacre were also forced to pay 250 Ethiopian dollars to take the corpses from Menilek II Hospital.¹²²

Even though workers were not active participants and their casualty was insignificant during the demonstration, the eve of the 1977 May Day celebration is still remembered as black eve of May Day in the history of the Ethiopian working class movement. It was the day when the highest carnage was committed even in the history of red terror in this country. Jacob Wiebel for instance argued that "...the massacres that erupted in Addis Ababa on the eve of May Day in 1977 marked the single most violent day in the history of the Ethiopian terror."¹²³ Bahru Zewde also succinctly put the horrifying carnage of the day as "...the carnage of May Day 1977 was the dress rehearsal for the massive killings that characterized the third phase of the government terror."¹²⁴ Qonjit Berhan, one of the members of the Youth League, gave her eye witness account of the massacre of the eve of May Day as follows. The eve of the 1977 May Day was:

...በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ ታይቶ የማያውቅ የወጣት ዕልቂት የደረሰበት ዕለት! ወላጆች ለልጆቻቸው መግደያ የተተኮሰውን ጥይት ዋጋ ከፍለው የልጆቻቸውን አስከሬን ለመውሰድ እንኳን የተከለከሉበት ቀን! እናቶች መውለዳቸውን የረገሙበት ክፉ ጊዜ! ሰሜን የሌለው ጩኸት አዲስ አበባን ያስጨነቀበት ወቅት! አዲስ አበባ ከየካቲት 12 የግራዚያኒ ጭፍጨፋ በኋላ ዳግም ትልቅ የለቅሶ ቤት የሆነችበት የጨለማ ቀን! ከጣሊያን በመጡ ሳይሆን ማህፀኗ በፈጠራቸው ፋሽስቶች ማቅ የለበሰችበት ቀን!¹²⁵

...The day when unprecedented massacre of youths happened in Ethiopia! The day when parents were denied to take the corpse of their children even after paying for the bullet with which they were killed! A trying time that mothers cursed the day they gave birth! A time when Addis Ababa was anxious by a voice which had no one to hear it! The darkest day that Addis Ababa became a mourning house after the Fascist Italy massacre in February 19[1937]! A day that [Ethiopia] wore a black mourning clothing not because of the Fascists who came from Italy but due to those who grew from her womb!

¹²²Hiwet Teffera, *Tower in the Sky* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2012), p. 243; Andargachew Tiruneh, pp. 211-212; Babile, pp. 141-142; Qonjit Berhan, *Yalarāfu Nāfesoč* (Addis Ababa: Far East Trading PLC, 2010), pp. 166-167.

¹²³Wiebel, p. 157.

¹²⁴Bahru Zewde, "The "Red Terror" in Ethiopia: Historical Context and Consequences," in *Society, state and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008), p. 439.

¹²⁵Qonjit, pp.167-168.

Besides the total annihilation of EPRP by the regime, the heinous massacre on the eve of the 1977 May Day demoralized workers and apparently forced them to abandon anti-government demonstrations in subsequent May Day celebrations.

May Day celebrations from 1978 to 1991 were organized under the full control of the government. It had used May Day celebrations to mobilize supporters and broadcast its strength not only to the broad masses of the country but also to the international community. It had also used them to strengthen its solidarity with the working class and the rest of the Ethiopian people against its internal and external enemies. Primarily, the government had used May Day celebrations to condemn the Somali irredentists, the liberation fronts, opposition groups and all anti-revolutionary movements. The following slogans which were shouted by workers and hoisted on their placards during the May Day celebrations succinctly indicated that the regime had used the day to mobilize the workers and the broad masses of the country for the war against those groups. Among the major slogans which were shouted and hoisted on placards by the workers during the May Day celebrations were: "Revolutionary Mother Land or Death!" "Everything to the War Front!" "The Objective of the Red Star Campaign is People Centered!" "Death to the CIA Mercenaries, EPLF and TPLF!" The proletariats are the forerunners to the call of the motherland!"¹²⁶

¹²⁶Ethiopian Herald, 28 April 1981 (*Miyazeya* 20, 1973 EC); 2 May 1989 (*Miyazeya* 24, 1981 EC); 3 May 1985 (*Miyazeya* 25, 1977 EC); 2 May 1990 (*Miyazeya* 24, 1982); *Sārtoadār*, *Miyazeya* 21, 1974 EC (29 April 1982).

Figure 4.13. Revolutionary Mother Land or Death! Figure 4.14. The Red Star Campaign has Popular Support!
Source: Ethiopian Herald, 28 April 1981 Source: *Särtoadär*, *Miyazeya* 21, 1974 EC
(*Miyazeya* 20, 1973 EC) (29 April 1982)



Figure4.15 Everything to the War Front!

Source: Ethiopian Herald, 2 May 1989 (*Miyazeya* 24, 1981 EC)

The second major issue that the government disseminated during the May Day celebrations was related with the establishment of COPWE, the organization of the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) and the formation of the Peoples Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE). Thus, May Day celebrations were used to mobilize workers and other sections of the society to work for the formation of the party and the people's government. In this regard, among the major slogans which were repeatedly used and loudly heard and conspicuously seen at a distance during the May Day celebrations were the following: "the mission of COPWE would succeed!" "We shall organize WPE!" "The workers would implement WPE's decisions!" "We would endeavor for the

implementation of WPE's decisions!" "The objective of WPE is the proletariat's objective! and "We shall establish PDRE!"¹²⁷

Figure 4.16 The Mission of COPWE Would Succeed! 4.17. Proletariats would Implement WPE's Decisions!
Source: Ethiopian Herald, 4 May 1982 (Miyazeya 26, 1974 EC) Source: Ethiopian Herald, 3 May 1985 (Miyazeya 25, 1977 E



Figure 4.18. We shall struggle to build Peoples' Democratic Ethiopia!
Source: *Särtoadär*, Miyazeya 23, 1981EC.
(1 May 1989)

Figure 4.19. We shall build PDRE!
Source: Ethiopian Herald, 2 May 1989.
(Miyazeya 24, 1981 EC)

Thirdly, the government had used May Day celebrations to indoctrinate the working class and the broad masses of the country with Marxism-Leninism and the principles of socialism. It had also used the day to consolidate the core principle of its foreign policy, proletarian internationalism.¹²⁸ True, all socialist countries adopted proletarian internationalism as a core principle and urged workers to organize and fight their exploiters. The proponents of this concept argued that the problem of workers in one country is similar with the problem of workers in the rest of the world. Thus, they further argued that the workers should fight their common enemy

¹²⁷Ethiopian Herald, 4 May 1982 (Miyazeya 26, 1974 EC); 3 May 1985 (Miyazeya 25, 1977 EC); 2 May 1990 (Miyazeya 24, 1982 EC); 2 May 1989 (Miyazeya 24, 1981 EC); 1 May 1987 (Miyazeya 23, 1979 EC); *Särtoadär*, Miyazeya 23, 1981EC (1 May 1989).

¹²⁸*Mäskäräm*, A Marxist-Leninist Ideological Journal, Vol. I, No. 4, 1973 EC, p. 3.

jointly, not independently.¹²⁹ As a socialist country, Ethiopia also joined the camp to strengthen its foreign relations with the other socialist countries across the world.

During the imperial period, Ethiopia's foreign policy was more inclined to the West than the East. Likewise, since its establishment, CELU had been influenced by ICFTU and other western trade unions. As a result, its foreign policy was inclined towards the West than the East.¹³⁰ But, the government did not force it to shape its foreign relation only with Western trade unions. Following the coming to power of the military regime and the adoption of socialism, however, Ethiopia's foreign relation totally shifted from the West to the East. Proletarian Internationalism became the focus of the regime's foreign policy. Likewise, the foreign relation of the Ethiopian working class shifted in line with the government's foreign policy. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL-CIO) and African Labour Center were expelled out of the country. Instead, AETU was advised to strengthen its relations with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and other trade unions of socialist countries.¹³¹ Regarding the core principle of its foreign policy, AETU noted that:

...መ.አ.ሠ.ማ ከዚህ መርህ በመነሳት የውጭ ግንኙነት ፖሊሲውን ይቀይሳል፤ በመሆኑም የመላ ኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ማህበር ከተራማጅና የሶሻሊስት ሐገሮች የሠራተኛ ማህበራት ጋር በ ወዝ አደራዊ ዓለም አቀፋዊነት መርህ ላይ የተመሰረተ ግንኙነት በመፍጠር በተለያዩ የዓለም ዓቀፍ ስብሰባዎች ላይ ተካፋይ በመሆን በሚያደርጋቸው አስተዋፅዖች የሶሻሊስቱን ካምፕ በማጠናከር ለኢምፔራሊስት ካምፕ መዳከም ተጨማሪ ድጋፍ ሰጥቷል።¹³²

...AETU would draft its foreign policy based on this principle [Proletarian Internationalism]. Thus, by creating relationship with the trade unions of progressive socialist countries on the basis of the principle of proletarian internationalism and by participating in several international meetings and contributing its part, AETU provided with an additional support to weakening the imperialist camp by strengthening the socialist camp.

¹²⁹Bozinovski, pp. 22-23.

¹³⁰AETU, "AETU and International Trade Unions," unpublished (Amharic), Addis Ababa, *Sänè* 1974 EC/June 1982, p. 30.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, p.32..

¹³²*Ibid.*, p.33.

The government had often used May Day celebrations to urge workers to strengthen their relations with the world proletariat. Thus, the workers had been forced to praise socialism, Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism in the slogans they used to shout and hoist on their placards during May Day celebrations. Among others, the slogans which were shouted and hoisted on their placards during May Day demonstrations were the following: “the world would come under the control of the proletariat!” “Long live Proletarian Internationalism!” “Marxism-Leninism is our Guiding principle!” “Long live May Day!” “The working class's historical mission would succeed!”.¹³³

Figure 4. 20 Let Proletarian Internationalism Flourish! Source: *Addis Zāmān*, *Miyazeya* 24, 1979 EC (2 May 1987)

Figure 4.21. Marxism-Leninism is our Guiding Principle! Source: *Ethiopian Herald*, 1 May 1981 (23 *Miyazeya* 1973 EC)



Figure 4.22. Our Struggle is for Peace and Socialism
Source: *Ethiopian Herald*, 1 May 1987 (*Miyazeya* 23, 1979 EC)

¹³³ *Addis Zāmān*, *Miyazeya* 24, 1979 EC (2 May 1987); *Ethiopian Herald*, 1 May 1987 (*Miyazeya* 23, 1979 EC); 1 May 1981 (23 *Miyazeya* 1973 EC); 4 May 1982 (*Miyazeya* 26, 74 EC).

In general, even though May Day was celebrated with massive street demonstrations in the presence of different guests of honor, including the leaders of the country, from 1975 to 1991, the workers had never used it to strengthen their solidarity, express their grievances, show their abilities and present their demands. It was rather used as a stage for opposition groups to flex their muscle by dividing the workers. For the first three years, it was virtually used as a battle ground for the warring groups, the EPRP and EWRU on the one hand and the *Därg* and *Mieson* on the other. After the *Därg* totally annihilated its opponents, May Day continued to serve merely as an important occasion in which the regime consolidated its support, disseminated its policies and indoctrinated the people of Ethiopia in general and the working class in particular with its ideology. Thus, one can argue that the May Day celebrations in Ethiopia failed to meet the very objective for which it was instituted.

4.4. Ethiopian Trade Unions (ETU) and the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE)

The third General Congress of the All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU) met from 30 April to 1 May 1986 and passed an eleven point resolution to improve the structure and function of the organization. One of the resolutions, for instance, called on AETU to transform its organizational structure in line with the stage of development of the country. The name of the organization was also changed from AETU to ETU. Regarding this change, the resolution stated that: "...ከዛሬ ሚያዚያ 23, 1978 ዓ.ም ጀምሮ የማህበራችን መጠሪያ የመላው ኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ማህበር /መኪሠማ/ መሆኑ ቀርቶ የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ማህበር /ኢሠማ/ እንዲሆን ጉባኤው ወስኗል።"¹³⁴ True, the initiative to restructure AETU was taken by the government to make the organization fit with the structure of the Workers Party of Ethiopia

¹³⁴"...The [3rd] General Congress of AETU decided that the All Ethiopian Trade Unions (AETU) is replaced by Ethiopian Trade Unions (ETU) as of the First of May 1986. See also *Addis Zämān*, *Miyazeya* 24, 1978 EC (2 May 1986).

(WPE). The task of restructuring AETU was ordered by Sergeant Lägäsä Asfaw, one of the top *Därg* officials.¹³⁵ Since *Meison* members under POMOA had played a significant role in the creation of AETU, one can argue that one of the reasons, particularly, for the change of the name, was to expunge the legacy of the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (*Meison*)!

Besides restructuring the organization, however, the two day Congress elected 64 workers as permanent members and 11 workers as alternate members for the Central Council respectively. Similarly, 29 workers were also elected as members to the Central Control Committee. In the second day of the Congress, the permanent and alternate members held a meeting and elected 9 executive committee of ETU. Accordingly, Tadässä Tamrat and Tägänè Gämäču were elected as president and vice president of ETU respectively. Likewise, Yohannes Täfäri and Alāmayāhu Tadässä were elected as General Secretary and vice secretary of the organization respectively. Berhānu Mola, Jāganu Borāda, Mogās Gètačāw, Fantu Gābrä Egziabhèr and Mālaku Wirtu were also elected as members of the executive committee. Most of the executive committee members, including the president and vice president, were elected for the second term in 1986. Tameru Çanè, Ayälä Gäbru and Alāmu Yāšanāw were also elected as members of the Central Control Committee.¹³⁶

The leaders of ETU argued that the main objective of restructuring the organization was to avoid overlapping responsibility and authority between regional trade unions and industrial unions from the local to provincial level. The industrial unions which were established from *wārāda* to provincial levels were dissolved and only local and national industrial unions were left to

¹³⁵Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 E.C/2012), p. 247.

¹³⁶Ethiopian Herald, 2 May 1986 (*Miyazeya* 24, 1978); Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät ...*, pp. 248-249.

continue in the structure. The national industrial union was however divided into 9 industrial union federations.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, since the initiative came from the government, it is possible to argue that the main objective of restructuring the organization was to align its structure with the structure of WPE and bring it under strict control of the government. The organizational structure was formed in a way that ETU could be able to execute the policies and programs of the WPE. It received orders and guidelines from the party whenever it passed decisions on major issues. In the preamble of its newly drafted constitution, ETU clearly described that it was ready to receive organizational and ideological leadership from the WPE and work for the implementation of its programs. It was also argued that ETU would struggle to realize PDRE and consolidate socialism in the country. Regarding this, the constitution stated that:

...ዛሬም ከሠራተኛው ማኅበር የሚጠበቀው የትግል ድርሻ ከመደባዊ ተልዕኮው መሳካት አንፃር እያደገ የሚሄድ ነው። ስለሆነም የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ማህበር/ኢሰማ/ ድርጅታዊና ርዕዮተዓለማዊ አመራርን ከኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ፓርቲ/ኢሰማ/ እያገኘ ለኢሰማ ፕሮግራም ተግባራዊነት፣ በተለይም ለሕዝባዊት ዲሞክራሲያዊት ኢትዮጵያ መገንባትና ለሶሻሊዝም ዕውን መሆን፣ እንዲሁም ለአብዮታዊት ኢትዮጵያ የፀረ ኢምፔሪያሊስት አቋም መጠናከር በሚደረገው ትግል ውስጥ ሠራተኛው የተጣለበትን ኅላፊነት እንዲወጣ የዕለት ተዕለት አመራር የሚሰጥና የፓርቲውን ፖሊሲ ያሟያስፈፅም ብሔራዊ የሠራተኛ ማህበር ነው።¹³⁸

...The struggle that is still expected to be contributed today by the workers' organization would grow in line with the success of the working class's mission. Thus, ETU is a national trade union which would get organizational and ideological leadership from WPE and endeavor for the implementation of WPE' programs, more importantly, for the building of PDRE and the realization of Socialism, and would also execute the policy of the party and give a day today leadership to the workers to carry out their responsibility in the revolutionary Ethiopia's anti imperialist struggle.

Like its precursor, ETU continued to use democratic centralism as the guiding principle of its organizational structure and day to day function. In Article 6 of its constitution, ETU lucidly asserted that: "...የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ማህበር ድርጅታዊ አወቃቀርና አሰራር በዲሞክራሲያዊ ማዕከላዊነት መርህ ላይ የተመሰረተ

¹³⁷Ethiopian Trade Unions, "The Constitution of Ethiopian Trade Unions, *Miyazeya*, 1978 EC/ April, 1986", p. 2.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 1.

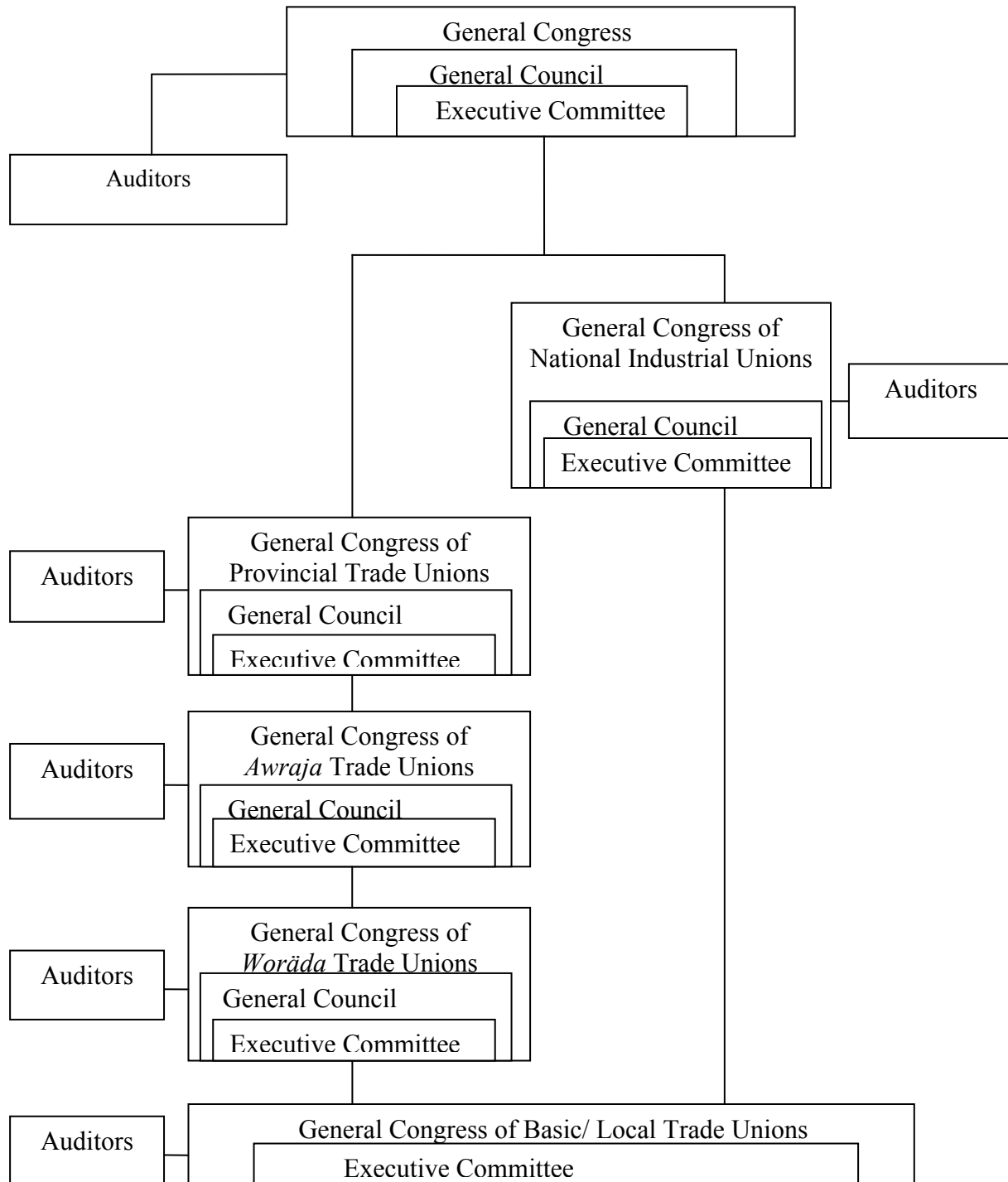
ነው።"¹³⁹ Thus, the lower trade unions were often obliged to respect the orders of ETU or other higher trade unions in the organizational hierarchy. ETU was primarily organized as one of the political organs of the state. It gave priority to the policies and programs of the government. In one of its objectives stated under Article 1/iii of its constitution, ETU stated that: "...የኢሥፓን ፕሮግራም ተግባራዊ ለማድረግ በየዘርፉ በሚካሄደው ትግል የሰራተኛውን ተሳትፎ ማሳደግ"¹⁴⁰ In doing so, it established an ideological committee in each basic trade union across the country to indoctrinate workers with Marxism-Leninism. As a result, a number of workers were forced to be members of the party.¹⁴¹ Thus, one can argue that the new organizational structure could not help the Ethiopian workers to realize their enduring dream, creating an independent trade union in the country.

¹³⁹"...The organizational structure and function of ETU based on the principles of democratic centralism." See also Ethiopian Trade Unions, "The Constitution of Ethiopian Trade Unions, *Miyazya*, 1978 EC/ April, 1986", p. 5.

¹⁴⁰"...Develop the participation of workers in all sorts of struggle to implement the programs of the WPE." See also Ethiopian Trade Unions, "The Constitution of Ethiopian Trade Unions, *Miyazya*, 1978 EC/ April, 1986", p.1.

¹⁴¹Ethiopian Trade Unions, "The Constitution of Ethiopian Trade Unions, *Miyazya*, 1978 EC/ April, 1986", p. 22.

Figure 4.23. The Organizational Structure of ETU



Source: Ethiopian Trade Unions, "The Constitution of Ethiopian Trade Unions, *Miyazeya*, 1978 EC, p. 4.

Even though ETU was structured in line with the structure of WPE, which was formed under Proclamation No. 267/1984 on 10 September 1984; it was not fairly represented in the Central Council and Politburo of the party. In its preamble, the proclamation noted the following rationale behind the establishment of WPE:

...to ensure the achievement of the final objective of building socialism and subsequently communism, the revolutionary government had established COPWE with the special mandate of organizing the vanguard party of the Working People of Ethiopia based on Marxist-Leninist principles and the commission has successfully accomplished its mission of organizing the party, the Workers' Party of Ethiopia.¹⁴²

The proclamation to provide for the establishment of WPE repealed Proclamation No.174/1979 that had created COPWE. As a result, WPE was able to control all mass organizations which had been under the control of COPWE, including trade unions. Article 4 of the proclamation, for instance, stated that: "...the property, establishment and services of the Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia are hereby transferred to the Workers' Party of Ethiopia."¹⁴³ Thus, the party controlled everything and began to lead both the state and the society. It also introduced its programs in place of the National Democratic Program of 1976.¹⁴⁴

Worth mentioning here is that though the party was named after the working class, it was dominated by the armed forces. The founding Congress of the WPE was held in a hall built for the purpose from 6 to 10 September 1984. It coincided with the 10th anniversary of the revolution and the 3rd Congress of COPWE. The Congress comprised nearly two thousand participants who

¹⁴²*Nägarit Gazëta*, Proclamation No. 267/1984, 10 September 1984 (*Pagumè* 5, 1977 EC).

¹⁴³*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*, p. 256.

were selected from all hierarchies of COPWE, army, workers, peasants, scholars and other civil functionaries. Around three hundred fifty observers comprised of representatives of socialist countries, communist parties and ambassadors also attended the founding Congress.¹⁴⁵ Among the nearly 2000 participants of the founding Congress, the working class constituted only 19.26% (385 persons). A significant number of participants were selected from the armed forces and government officials which totally accounted for 68.93% (1378 persons). The remaining 11.81% (236 persons) of the participants were elected from the peasants.¹⁴⁶

The five day Congress not only established the Workers' Party of Ethiopia but also ratified the programs of the party, set up its various organs and elected its leaders. Nevertheless, the workers were under represented in the various organs of the party, as was the case in the founding Congress. The General Congress, Central Committee and Politburo were the three major organs of the party. While the Central Committee had 136 permanent and 64 alternate members, the Politburo comprised 11 permanent and 6 alternate members. As the founding Congress, the Central Committee and the Politburo of the party were dominated by the armed forces and ex soldiers. For instance, they accounted for 64% of the permanent and 39% of the alternate members of the Central Committee respectively. Since they did not have the right to vote, most of the alternate members were civilian recruited from different mass organizations and scholars. Moreover, seven of the permanent and 2 of the alternate Politburo members were elected from

¹⁴⁵*Sārtoadār, Mäskäräm* 1, 1977EC (11 September 1984); Fesseha Dästa, p. 353; *Gäseṭ Täčanè, Nābār*, Part II, 5th edition (Addis Ababa, 2004 EC), p. 58.

¹⁴⁶*Gäseṭ*, p. 59; Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 88.

the armed forces. Thus, one can argue that the party was virtually dominated by the armed forces.¹⁴⁷

Figure 4.24. The Central Committee Members of WPE



Source: Fesseha Dästa, *Abyotu ena Tezetayè* (Los Angeles; Addis Ababa: Tsehai Publishers, 2008), p. 355.

Despite the fact that the party was named after it, the Ethiopian working class and its organization, AETU, had no place in the Politburo, the executive organ of the party. The representation of AETU in the Central Committee was also much lower than the armed forces and other mass organizations like the All Ethiopian Peasant Associations (AEPA). AETU had only 9 permanent and 4 alternate members in WPE.¹⁴⁸ It was only the president, vice president and secretaries of AETU, and the presidents of the 9 industrial unions who represented the

¹⁴⁷Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*, p. 257; Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indian University Press, 1988), pp. 237-238; *Särtoadär*, *Mäskäräm* 1, 1977EC (11 September 1984).

¹⁴⁸Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity...*, p. 85.

working class in the Central Committee of WPE. The unfair representation continued even after the transformation of AETU into ETU.¹⁴⁹ Thus, one can argue that even though most of the Ethiopian workers were member of the WPE and the party was named after them, they were not given a commensurate position in the party.

Following its establishment, WPE began to engage in preparing the platform for the inauguration of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. In doing so, a constitution drafting commission comprised of 347 members was organized with the power to draft the constitution. Among the 347 members 15 were elected as executive committee members. Among others, Tadässa Tamerat, the president of ETU, was, for instance, elected as one of the 15 executive committee members. The majority of members were drawn from WPE. But, some individuals from religious institutions, professional associations and patriot associations were included as members of the commission.¹⁵⁰

In June 1986, the commission issued a 17 chapter and 120 article draft constitution. The draft was endorsed by the majority of the people in a referendum which was held on 1 February 1987.¹⁵¹ Thereafter, the constitution was ratified in the founding Congress of the PDRE which was held on 11 September 1987.¹⁵² The constitution declared that the PDRE was the government of the proletariats. Article 1/i of the constitution, for instance, stated that: "...የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝባዊ ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሪፐብሊክ በሠራተኛውና በገበሬው ሕብረት በሙህሩ በኢኮኖሚያዊ ሠራዊት በዕደጥበብ ባለሙያውና በሌሎች

¹⁴⁹Informants: Gëtačāw Yosëf, Gëtačāw Mängäša and Berhanähiwot Libanos.

¹⁵⁰Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*pp. 275-76; Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to...*, pp. 239-240.

¹⁵¹Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to...*, pp. 239-240.

¹⁵²Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution...*pp. 279-280.

ዴሞክራሲያዊ የህብረተሰብ ክፍሎች ተሳትፎ የተመሰረተ የሰርዓተደራሲ ሕዝብ መንግስት ነው።"¹⁵³ In addition, the constitution gave the sovereign power of the country to the proletariat. Article 3 of the constitution clearly put it as follows. "...በኢትዮጵያ ሕዝባዊ ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሪፐብሊክ ሥልጣን የሠርዓተደራሲ ሕዝብ ነው።"¹⁵⁴ Regardless of what was guaranteed by the constitution, however, the Ethiopian working class remained powerless and under strict control of the military regime. Much worse than the imperial period, workers' organizations were reduced to one of the agencies of the government. Thus, one can argue that the dream of the working class for establishing an independent labour movement was fully aborted during the military regime.

Conclusion

The Ethiopian working class in general and CELU in particular had good relationship with the *Därg* from June to September 1974. The former gave its full support to all reforms introduced by the latter. The contradiction between the two started in September 1974 when the *Därg* seized power and restricted democratic rights. Unlike other mass organizations, CELU opposed outright the ascendance of the military to power. The *Därg* responded harshly by arresting the three leaders of CELU. In addition, it tried to control the Ethiopian working class through divide and rule tactics by co-opting Alām Abdi, the vice president of the organization. Nevertheless, it faced serious challenge from the radical workers who were influenced by the clandestine leftist parties and failed to control the working class. This forced the *Därg* to reorganize the Ethiopian working class on the basis of socialist principles and to transform CELU into AETU. The newly

¹⁵³"...PDRE is the government of the proletariats established by the participation of the worker-peasant cooperation, the scholars, the revolutionary army, the artisans and other sections of the society."; See also The Constitution of PDRE, *Mäskäräm* 1, 1980EC (11 September 1987).

¹⁵⁴"...In the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, power is bestowed on the proletariats." See also The Constitution of PDRE, *Mäskäräm* 1, 1980EC (11 September 1987).

established organization, however, continued to be a center of conflict between the *Därg* and its leftist supporters on the one hand and EPRP and EWRU on the other. This made the organization a battleground until the total annihilation of the latter.

Following the total annihilation of EPRP and other leftist parties, the *Därg* fully controlled the Ethiopian working class. AETU also began to serve as one of the agencies of the government. Besides supporting the reforms of the PMAC, AETU actively engaged in defending the revolution from both internal and external enemies. The participation of the workers' militia brigades in the Somalia-Ethiopian war can be taken as a case in point. Though it was introduced to enhance the government's foreign relations mainly with socialist countries, the declaration of May Day as one of the national holidays added impetus to the relation between trade unions and the military government.

Since AETU was under the full control of the government, however, its foreign relation and organizational structure was designed in line with the political development of the country. The organization was repeatedly restructured not to improve the conditions of workers but rather to align it with the structure of COPWE and later with WPE and thereby strengthen the government's control on the organization. The transformation of AETU into ETU was also mainly initiated by the government for its own sake. The organization was simply used as a political tool by the government to build socialism in the country. For instance, though the party was named after the working class, ETU was not given appropriate positions either in the WPE or later in PDRE.

Thus, though the relation between trade unions and the military regime was marred by conflicts for the first three years, it continued peacefully under the domination of the latter until 1991. Nevertheless, the activities of trade unions were virtually controlled and guided by the government. AETU and later ETU were fully controlled and reduced to being one of the agencies of the government. Trade unions were forced not only to support the policies and programs of the government but also to integrate them with their day to day activities and execute them. As a result, the dream of the Ethiopian working class for establishing an independent working class movement became a nightmare during the military regime.

CHAPTER FIVE

LABOUR EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA: THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS AND THE STATE IN EDUCATING THE INDUSTRIAL LABOUR FORCE, 1963-1991

The relation between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia has been characterized by serious contradiction and hostility. While the state has often tried to control the activities of trade unions through legislation and direct security measures, trade unions on their part have often expressed their grievances, called for the dissolution of labour laws, demanded the promulgation of progressive laws and struggled to establish an independent labour movement in the country. These antagonistic relations hindered the two parties from working together for the socio-economic and political development of the country. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the relations between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia had always been hostile; rather there were times when both worked for their mutual benefit and the benefit of the country. Among other things, trade unions and the state worked together to defend the sovereignty of the country, alleviate natural calamities (famine) and educate the industrial labour force. Attempts have already been made in the previous chapter to explain how the two parties worked together to defend the sovereignty of the country during the Somali-Ethiopia war of (1977-78). Thus, this chapter tries to investigate how trade unions and the state worked together to educate the industrial labour force across the country.

Labour education refers to any planned educational activities carried out by a trade union itself or in cooperation with any other external educational institutions or governmental agencies or international trade unions. It encompasses any educational and training programs that involve workers. According to International Labour Organization (ILO), labour education is a branch of adult education that equips workers with basic knowledge and skills concerning the function of unions, general education and socio-economic problems of the country. In general, education involving workers is divided into three categories. These are union education, workers' education and labour studies. The delivery of labour education is often undertaken by labour educators drawn from the Labour Education Department of national trade unions, international trade unions, labour institutes, universities and independent educators who have the expertise in labour and labour related issues. The main objectives of labour education are to equip union members with skills and knowledge of unionization and establish a strong trade union, help workers to upgrade their education and improve their standard of living, and support them to easily understand the socio-economic problems of the country and carry out their endeavor together with the government to mitigate those problems.¹

Cognizant of the role of labour education for the overall development of trade unions and the improvement of the living standard of each individual worker in the country, CELU continued to provide educational services to its affiliated union members. Since its establishment, CELU made labour education one of its primary tasks. It believed that instructing members about the various issues of labour would determine the strength of the organization. For instance, in his

¹International Labour Organization (ILO) Bureau for Labour Activities, "The role of trade unions in workers' education: The key to trade union capacity building," *A Background Paper presented in International Workers' Symposium in Geneva, 8–12 October, 2007*, p.1; Rashid A. Aderinoye, "Labour education in Nigeria: Structures and Implications for Nation Building," *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 1998, p. 192, DOI: [10.1080/0260137980170305](https://doi.org/10.1080/0260137980170305).

speech during the commencement of a seminar held at the headquarters of CELU on 8 June 1970, Fesehaşeyon Tākè, the General Secretary of CELU clearly put the importance of education for Ethiopian workers not only to strengthen their unions but also to ensure their wellbeing. He noted that "...የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች አንድነት ማህበር (ኢሠአማ) ከሚያከናውናቸው ተግባሮች አንዱና ከፍተኛው ትምህርትን ለአባሎቹ መስጠት ነው። ...ኢሠአማ አባሎቹን የሚያስተምረው የሠራተኛ ነክ ትምህርት ብቻ አይደለም። መሰረተ ትምህርትን/ማንበብና መጻፍ/ የመርሀ ሙያ ትምህርትና የመሳሰሉትንም ያጠቃልላል።"² True, one can assume that CELU by itself was the result of labour education as it was established after a seminar organized by the MNCD in collaboration with ICFTU and HSIU.

CELU conducted over a dozen educational seminars for its affiliated union members. It also launched vocational training programs for union members at Täfäri Mäkonän School, College of Building Technology and Asmāra Technical School. In addition, CELU conducted Literacy Campaign and subject education among the industrial labour force.³ CELU's endeavor in educating the industrial labour force was also further strengthened by its successors, AETU and ETU.

The establishment of the Labour Education Department inside CELU demonstrated that educating the industrial labour force in general and members of the affiliated unions in particular was one of the primary tasks of the confederation. In its report to the executive committee of CELU, the Labour Education Department noted that education was very important to improve the socio-economic life of the industrial labour force. It further argued that "...የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች

²"...educating union members has been one of the major activities undertaken by CELU. ...CELU does not only teach union education. It rather incorporates basic education/reading and writing/, vocational training and etc."

³*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, April 1970, p. 10.

አንድነት ማህበር የአባሎች ደህንነት፣ የኢኮኖሚና የማህበራዊ አቋማቸው የተጠበቀ ሆኖ የኑሮ ደረጃቸው እንዲሻሻል ለማድረግ ተቀዳሚ ተግባር ያደረገው ለአባል ሰራተኞች ትምህርት መስጠት ነው።"⁴ CELU had since its inception given priority to education of its membership. It had been conducting literacy courses for its members utilizing the service of HSIU students during the summer vacation.⁵

Like CELU, the Imperial Government of Ethiopia had already recognized the importance of education for industrial workers even before the establishment of trade unions in the country. Since most of the major posts in several industries were occupied by expatriates, the government had a desire to replace these foreign workers by educating the Ethiopian labour force. In the first Five Year Development Plan (1957-61), the government underscored the necessity of educating the industrial labour force to replace expatriates in some major industries of the country as follows.

...There is no doubt that the lack of skilled labour is one of the greatest impediments to the country's development and is being felt in all fields of the economy. Owing to the shortage of qualified personnel Ethiopia is compelled to obtain experts from abroad. In the present phase of development they are a necessity and it would be very difficult to conceive a greater economic activity without them. For many reasons, however, this situation gives rise to certain undesirable consequences. Foreign experts are very expensive, and such high expenditure imposes no small burden on the economy. Nevertheless, this burden has to be borne now as well as in the future, for the number of qualified Ethiopians is still small and is growing at an insufficient pace. ... [Nevertheless,] the country must make great efforts to solve this difficult problem.⁶

⁴"...in order to protect the safety, the economic and social welfare of its members and improve their standard of living, CELU took educating its members as its primary task." See also CETU, Box No. 22, File No. 03, A Report by Department of Education to the Executive committee of CELU on 13 *Hedar* 1962 EC (22 November 1970).

⁵*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, 1970, p. 16.

⁶Imperial Ethiopian Government, "First Five Year Development Plan, 1957-1961," Addis Ababa, March 1956, p.18.

Similarly, in the Second Five Year Development Plan (1963-1967) and Third (1969-1973) Five Year Development Plan, the government clearly indicated the need for educating the industrial labour force in line with the growing demands of the industries. In the Second Five Year Development plan, the government, for instance, stated that:

...The growing industrial production will demand a considerable additional labour force, workers and employees of various occupations and skill. Considering that there is no such personnel at present it is necessary to insist that it be trained faster both at home and abroad. The various planned industrial projects will demand that the training of technical personnel be ensured by the university and secondary schools, while different methods will have to be used to train skilled workmen. It should be emphasized that the timely training of the needed labour force and technical personnel is one of the essential conditions for the implementation of the Second Five Year Plan industrial targets."⁷

Likewise, in the Third Five Year Development Plan, the government planned to train the labour force in three different levels: high skill, intermediate skill and skilled manpower level (lower skill level). Much emphasis was, however, given to the third level of education. In general, the Third Five Year Development Plan focused on expanding vocational programs across the country. In this plan, the government further noted that "...a fundamental objective of the Third Plan is to see that the education system becomes more closely related to the need for skilled manpower of all types in the development of the country. Particular emphasis during the Third Plan will be on secondary, technical and vocational education programs."⁸

Even though much emphasis was given to the rural population, the military regime also made several attempts at different times to educate the industrial labour force of the country. The promulgation of Proclamation No.11 of 1974, "Development through Cooperation,

⁷Imperial Ethiopian Government, *Second Five Year Development Plan, 1963-1967* (Addis Ababa, October 1962), p. 193.

⁸Imperial Ethiopian Government, *Summery of Third Five Year Plan*, (Addis Ababa, November 1968), p. 10.

Enlightenment and Work Campaign", and the establishment of the National Literacy Organization in 1979 to equip the rural population with basic education also helped the nearby industrial labour force in terms of functional literacy and introducing them to the revolutionary literature.⁹

At the inauguration of the first Congress of the Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People in Ethiopia (COPWE) on 16 June 1980, Mengitsu Haile Mariam, the head of the state, described education as a tool for the general public to carry out a cultural revolution in the country. In his speech on the occasion, the president pointed out that: "...ትምህርትን፣ ሳይንሳዊ ርዕዮት ዓለምን፣ ፖለቲካዊ ዕውቀትን ለሰፊው ሕዝብ ለማዳረስ የሚደረገው ጥረት በባህል አብዮት ክልል ውስጥ የሚታይ ነው። በዚህ ረገድ ዛሬ ያተኮርንበት ማይምነትን የማስወገድ ዘመቻ ለመፍጠሩ የባህል ዕድገታችን መቀላጠፍ ዋነኛ መሳሪያ ነውና ከዕድገታችን አንጻር ልዩ ግምት የሚሰጠው ነው።"¹⁰

Moreover, the government repeatedly expressed its commitment to spread literacy and enlightenment among the working people. In its ideological journal, *Mäskäräm*, for instance, the government noted that: "...it is impossible to speed up the growth of the productive process unless illiteracy is abolished, educational opportunities are given to all, science and technology are developed and the general knowledge and technical know-how of the working people is raised"¹¹

⁹*Nägarit Gazeta*, Proclamation No. 11/1974, Addis Ababa 25th November, 1974; Germa Amare, "An Appraisal of the Literacy Campaign in Ethiopia during the Military Regime, 1974-1991," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1/2 (June-December 2006), p. 93. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41966171>.

¹⁰"...our endeavor to enrich the general public with education, scientific ideology and political knowledge can be seen as part of a cultural revolution. In doing so, the campaign to eradicate illiteracy to which we are presently giving particular emphasis, is a significant tool essential for the acceleration of our cultural development in the future and therefore deserves special consideration vis-a-vis the totality of our development." See also (Serto ader, An Ideological Magazine of COPWE, Sänè 12, 1972/ 19 June 1980).

¹¹COPWE, *Mäskäräm*, A Marxist-Leninist Ideological Journal, *Special issue*, 1982, p. 66.

This chapter, therefore, tries to assess how labour education contributed to workers to strengthen the capacity of their organization, improve their standard of living and get awareness about the socio-economic conditions of the country. It also surveys the nature and types of labour education provided for workers by their organization in collaboration with governmental institutions and international trade unions. How did trade unions and the government work together to improve the education level of workers? What changes did labour education bring in the capacity of trade unions and the life of each individual worker? To what extent did labour education contribute to the national effort towards eradicating illiteracy? What changes did union education bring on the organizational structure and modus operandi of trade unions in Ethiopia? How did workers' education help the Ethiopian workers to improve their level of education? What did labour studies contribute to workers to engage in the study of manpower and related socio-economic analysis carried out in the country? These are among the wide range of questions that this chapter delves into.

5.1. Union Education

Union education refers to any educational activity conducted by trade unions to consolidate their modus operandi. It can be divided as functional and subject educations. Functional education provides training to union members about the modus operandi of their union. It is through this education that workers learn to be unionists and begin to consolidate their solidarity and unity. It also enables union members to know the constitution and organizational structure of their union and represent their co-workers both at workplace and in the society at large. As the effectiveness of every union in collective bargaining and other activities primarily depends on its members' consciousness and education level, the role of union education is paramount in this regard.

Subject education, however, renders different subjects which are important for the function of the union. Among others, economics, law, accounting, international relations are given as subjects to improve the day to day function and foreign relation of trade unions. Union education has often been given by national trade unions. But, it can also be given by academic institutions, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and international trade unions in cooperation with national trade unions.¹²

5.1.1. Functional Education

It refers to training of union members about the modus operandi of their union. It can be delivered by either union leaders or labour experts or university instructors. In Ethiopia, functional education was started with a seminar arranged for 40 workers' representatives who came from 33 different enterprises from 4 to 16 March 1963. It was organized by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) in cooperation with Haile Selassie I University (HSIU), particularly, the Department of Public Administration, which was then the only department offering courses related to labour relations, and the Ministry of National Community Development (MNCD). While the ICFTU covered the financial expenses of the program and brought labour experts, the MNCD and HSIU made one of its student residences, *Saba* Hall, for the training and for trainers who assisted the ICFTU experts.¹³

The seminar was officially opened by Gètahun Tässäma, minister of the MNCD. The main objective of the seminar was to educate labour leaders about the nature and modus operandi of

¹²International Labour Organization (ILO) Bureau for Labour Activities, "The Role of Trade Unions in Workers' Education: The Key to Trade Union Capacity Building," *A Background Paper Presented in International Workers' Symposium in Geneva, 8–12 October 2007*, p. 1.

¹³*Addis Zämän*, *Yakatit* 26, 1955 EC (5 March 1963); *Mägabit* 9, 1955 EC (18 March 1963).

labour unions. Among other things, the seminar dealt with democratic union leadership, problems of union leadership, impediments for collective agreements, union administration, democratic union meetings, and the constitution and the labour laws of the country.¹⁴ The seminar did not only instruct workers' representatives and trade union leaders about the nature and essence of unionization but also created a platform for the birth of the first national confederation in the history of the country. Thus, one can argue that seminars were the most important methods used to give functional education for workers and their leaders.

At the end of the first seminar, CELU and ICFTU also planned to give seminars on functional education to workers and trade union leaders across the country every three months as of July 1963. For instance, the second seminar was given to 35 trade union leaders who had not received any training ever before in early September 1963. Most of the participants came from trade unions which were established after the formation of the national confederation. The seminar was held from 4 to 13 September 1963 at HSIU. Among other things, labour laws, constitution, union administration and problems of collective agreements were the major issues that the seminar dealt with. The seminar was jointly sponsored by ICFTU and CELU.¹⁵ A number of seminars had been given to workers and trade union leaders on the modus operandi of trade unions since the establishment of CELU. Most of the time, the seminar dealt with collective bargaining, history of the Ethiopian labour movement, labour laws and the Ethiopian constitution.

¹⁴ *Addis Zāmān*, *Yākatit* 26, 1955 EC (5 March 1963); Ethiopian Herald, 5 March 1963 (*Yekatit* 26, 1955EC); 17 March, 1963 (*Māgabit* 8, 1955 EC); Yā Mālaw Itēyopiya Sārātāñoč Mahebār, "Yā Itēyopiya Sārātāñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 58; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation of Labour Unions (CELU) and Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF) under the Haile Selassie Regime," un published monograph, Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York, 2005, p. 52; R. Stutz, "The Developing Industrial Relation System in Ethiopia," A Teaching Material, Addis Ababa University: Department of Economics, 1967, p. 114.

¹⁵ *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 2, *Hämlè* 20, 1955EC (27 July 1963); Stutz, p.115.

At the beginning, the educational level of a number of trade union leaders was below 5th grade. According to a survey conducted on union leadership in Ethiopia by Mäsfen Sahlè a junior student at the Department of Public Administration of HSIU in 1967, the educational level of union leaders was found to be very low. The survey was done on seventy seven officers drawn from 46 trade unions located at major towns and cities across the country.¹⁶

Table 3 -Number of Trade Union Leaders by Level of Education

Level of Education	Number of Trade Union Leaders
5 th Grade or Less	34
From Grade 6 to 8	22
From Grade 9 to 12	15
Some College Education	2
College Graduate	2
Graduate School	2

Source: R. Stutz, “The Developing Industrial Relation System in Ethiopia,” A Teaching Material, Addis Ababa University: Department of Economics, 1967, p.121.

The survey clearly attested the need for both workers education and union leadership training. Only two of the plant union leaders had any education beyond a secondary school. Thus, the union education conducted after the survey contributed a lot not only in improving the education level of the leaders but also in strengthening the function of the union itself. After the survey, a number of seminars on union education continued to be held at plant, provincial and national levels by both international and Ethiopian labour experts. In general, nearly 126 seminars with a

¹⁶Stutz, p.121.

total of 4497 participants were held at all levels across the country until the outbreak of the 1974 revolution. Such training opportunities were held in big cities and towns, including Addis Ababa, Asmāra and Dire Dawa.¹⁷ All those seminars were conducted through the generous financial assistance of ICFTU, AALC, Friedrich Ebert Foundation of West Germany and several other international trade union secretariats.¹⁸

Table 4- Number of Seminars and Participants, and the Cities/Towns where the Seminars were Held from 1963 to the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution.

City/Town	Number of Seminars	Number of Participants
Addis Ababa	38	1599
Nazareth and its Environs	33	925
Dire Dawa	19	584
Asmara	15	458
Aqaqi Bäsäqa	6	297
Däbrä Berehan	2	128
Assäb	7	275
Baher Dar	2	88
Meşewa	1	60
Tändaho	2	54
Kebrä Mängest	3	29
Total	126	4497

Source: Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 135; *Voice of Labour*, Special Issue for the 10th Anniversary of CELU, *Miyazeya*, 1965 EC (April 1973), p. 20.

¹⁷*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue for the 10th Anniversary of CELU, *Miyazeya*, 1965 EC (April 1973), p. 20; Stutz, p. 120.

¹⁸Beyene, p. 188.

Besides seminars, films were also used to impart union education to workers and union leaders. They were brought by ICFTU and AALC experts to strengthen union education in Ethiopia. Some films were made portraying strikes and labour movements in Europe and America. On the other hand, some other films were video recordings of actual strikes and labour movements in Western countries. A number of films were shown to workers in several plants across the country until the outbreak of the 1974 revolution. Among others, the *Grapes of Wrath* (1940), the *Organizer* (1963), *Strike in Town* (1955), *With these Hands* (1971), *Salt of the Earth* (1953), *On the Water Front* (1954) and *Strike* (1924) were the most important ones.¹⁹ The films were apparently used to teach the workers about the modus operandi of unions and how they struggle for their rights. They were not used to instigate workers and go out for strike against employers or the government.

Thus, functional education was not given only through instruction; rather it was also given through film shows. It was an interesting way to impart union education not only through hearing and reading but also through watching trade union actions in films. Those who attended the show were expected to transfer what they got from the film to their fellow workers back to their work place. In general, as a result of union education through seminars, short term trainings and film shows, nearly 42 percent of the total basic trade unions signed a collective agreement in mid 1973.²⁰ Thus, one can argue that labour education enhanced not only their awareness on the modus operandi of their unions but also strengthened their bargaining power in collective agreements.

¹⁹ CELU, Box No. 133, File No.056, it deals with films displayed for workers in different plants.

²⁰ *Voice of Labour*, Special Issue for the 10th year Anniversary of CELU, April 1973, p. 20.

Table 5- Number of Film Shows, Spectators and Towns/Cities where Films were displayed until 1974

City/Town	Number of Film Shows	Number of Spectators
Addis Ababa	33	8533
Nazareth and its Environs	45	29910
Dire Dawa	40	9068
Asmara and its environs	11	1653
Däbrä Berehan	3	1050
Assäb	3	1800
Baher Dar	5	5650
Tändaho	3	2100
Kebrä Māngest	5	2410
Total	148	62 174

Source: Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions, "A Report Presented on the 3rd Annual Congress of CELU," *Miyazeya* 10-12, 1964 EC, p. 3.

Since most of the workers were illiterate and could not understand English, individuals from CELU always helped them by translating the film into Amharic. Regardless of the language barrier, however, they often watched films enthusiastically. As compared to other methods of imparting union education to workers and trade union leaders, therefore, film shows played an indispensable role in strengthening the solidarity of workers. This was clearly observed among the workers of Dire Dawa Textile Factory, Franco-Ethiopian Railway and Dire Dawa Cement Factory from 9 to 21 August 1963. In those days, Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam and Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaël displayed films to the workers of the aforementioned companies and motivated them to

strengthen their unions. As a result, a number of workers joined the unions after they watched the working class struggle in the Western countries through the films.²¹

ICFTU not only sent labour experts who could give seminars to the Ethiopian workers but also gave them scholarships to attend functional education in its own labour institutes. A significant number of Ethiopian workers and trade union leaders, for instance, attended short term trainings in ICFTU's East Africa labour education institute, Kampala Labour College, Uganda. Initially, two Ethiopian workers received the scholarship and attended training on trade union leadership for about four months in the college in 1968. Thereafter, a numbers of workers and trade union leaders took similar training at the college. Besides ICFTU, other national trade unions provided short term training scholarships for CELU members since the establishment of the confederation. Ethiopian workers attended short term training in industrial relations and trade union leadership in several countries, including, Israel, Egypt, Senegal, England, Switzerland and West Germany.²² Thus, one can argue that union education showed significant progress until the outbreak of the 1974 revolution. The indispensable role that the Ethiopian workers played during the revolution could also partly be attributed to the union education which they had been exposed to before the revolution.

Immediately after the coming to power of the *Därg*, functional education began to decline because of the instability of the country in general and the division created among CELU leaders in particular. In addition, the expelling of ICFTU and AALC, the largest donors of union

²¹ *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 4, *Nähäse* 18, 1963EC (24 August 1963).

²² Stutz, p. 115.

education, from the country by labeling them as agents of the CIA by the government was one of the reasons for the decline of union education.²³

Nevertheless, after the *Därg* and POMOA took the upper hand over the Ethiopian workers by defeating EPRP and EWRU, union education and the reorganization of trade unions began to be carried out in line with the principles of socialism. Accordingly, the reorganization of CELU as AETU was conducted at the end of the seminar that trade unions representatives held at Ambo in the presence of PMAC, POMOA and MoLSA representatives from 30 December 1976 to 7 January 1977. The seminar dealt with the history of the world proletariat, the relationship between trade unions and the state, and the similarity and difference between trade unions and the workers' party.²⁴ Since its establishment, AETU also continued to provide seminars for all its affiliates.

Seminars were also given to workers spontaneously even before the establishment of AETU. For instance, following the proclamation of National Democratic Revolution (NDR) in April 1976, study circles were created in each trade union to indoctrinate workers with the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism. Facilitated by members of the POMOA, the study circles discussed for two hours every week the role of Marxism-Leninism in creating strong trade unions. Thus, the study circles influenced workers to reorganize their union in accordance with the principles of socialism. The government also used the study circles to identify its ardent supporters and

²³All Ethiopian Trade Unions, "All Ethiopian Trade Unions and International Trade Unions (in Amharic)," June 1982, pp. 8-10.

²⁴*Addis Fana*, Vol. 1, No.6, *Yekatit* 1969 EC (February 1977), pp. 10-11; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Tarik: Kā Eisāma Gizèyawī Komitè Esekā Mäeisāma Hulätäña Gubaè(Kefel 2)," *Yekatit*, 1976 EC./1984, p. 52; Tefera Haile Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1991: From a Monarchical Autocracy to a Military Oligarchy* (London; New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997), p. 177; Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy: The Saga of an Ethiopian Labour Leader* (Baltimore: Publish America, 2010), p. 169.

hardline opponents. In addition, the government provided them from one to six months training in the newly founded political school, *Yekatit 66*, on trade unions and socialism and the importance of Marxism-Leninism and democratic centralism for trade unions.²⁵

In addition to seminars, union education was given to workers and trade union leaders through short term trainings which were arranged both inside and outside the country. A number of union leaders and workers attended training lasting from one month to one year on trade union leadership in Marxism-Leninism, democratic centralism and proletarian internationalism in *Yekatit 66* political school. This was also supported by other socialist countries like German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Cuba and USSR. A number of students got union education from one month to two years in the political schools and trade union colleges of those countries. This enhanced the capacity of trade union leaders in Ethiopia.²⁶

²⁵Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär,"Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Tarik: Kä Eisäma....," p. 83; All Ethiopian Trade Unions, "A Report of the AETU's 2nd Council Meeting, March 1975," p.12.

²⁶CELU, Box No. 40, File No. 1, Number of workers who attended union education inside and outside the country from 1976 to 1988; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär,"Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Tarik: Kä Eisäma....," p. 84.

Table 6 -Number of Workers who attended Short term Training on Union Education by Industrial Union from 1976 to 1988.

Industrial Union	Number of Workers who attended Short term Training on Union Education		
	Inside the Country	Outside the Country	Total
Agriculture, Hunting, and Fishing	35	-	35
Mining and Quarrying	10	8	18
Manufacturing	200	28	228
Electric, Gas and Water	12	18	30
Construction	40	11	51
Whole Sale and Retail Trade	27	29	56
Transport and Communication	52	23	75
Bank, Insurance and Business	28	30	58
Hotel and Social Services	15	14	29

Source: CELU, Box No. 40, File No. 1, Number of workers who attended union education inside and outside the country from 1976 to 1988.

5.1.2. Subject Education

Even though much had been done in imparting functional education to workers and trade union leaders, it could not have created strong and viable trade unions in the country. There were also gaps in subject education among workers and trade union leaders that affected their struggle to create strong trade unions. Thus, functional education had to be supported by subject education to build a strong trade union. Among others, Economics, Law, Accounting, Management, International Relations and etc were the most important subjects which were given to enhance

the capacity of trade unions. To this end, Hailu Aga and Alämu Bogalä, the first and second Vice Secretary of CELU, were sent to Yugoslavia in late August 1963 to study economics for three years. The Yugoslavia Workers' Union gave the scholarship to CELU on 29 July 1963.²⁷

Similarly, Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam and Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaël, who were serving as interpreters in CELU since March 1963 and as editors of the *Voice of Labour* since July of the same year were sent to USA for their graduate study. They received the scholarship from the United Automobile Workers (UAW) based in Detroit with the support of AALC. Thus, they joined Wayne State University in September 1964 to study labour economics for two years. After they came back in 1966, they were elected as executive members of CELU and contributed a lot to the development of the confederation until the 1974 revolution. While Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaël was appointed as Director of the Department of Education, Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam was assigned as director of the Department of Law and Economics.²⁸ By the end of 1970, for instance, CELU had among its permanent staffs more than half a dozen men with a master's degree in labour economics and administration.²⁹

²⁷*Voice of Labour*, Vol.1, No. 3, *Nähäse* 4,1955EC(10 August 1963).p. 2;*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 4, *Nähäse* 18, 1955EC (24 August 1963), p. 8.

²⁸ Informant: Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam.

²⁹ Robert L. Hess, *Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 84.

Figure 5.1. Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam and Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaël at Wayne State University, Detroit.



Source: Voice of Labour, *Nähässè* 1958EC (August 1966)

Moreover, law was another important subject that CELU urged its members to learn and become self sufficient during the signing of collective agreements. With the financial support of AALC and ICFTU, 20 workers and union leaders joined Addis Ababa University and graduated with a Diploma in Law. After they graduated, they continued to represent their unions during the signing of collective agreements.³⁰

Similarly, a number of union members received subject education during the *Därg* regime. This education helped them to strengthen their union. The education was given both inside and outside the country. For instance, Addis Ababa University contributed a lot to trade unions by providing scholarship for their members to study law, economics and business administration. In

³⁰Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy: The Saga of ...*, pp.186-187.

addition, a number of union members received scholarship from Russia, Bulgaria, German Democratic Republic, Cuba and Hungary to study different subjects.³¹ Thus, one can argue that providing union members with functional and subject education could make trade unions very effective in their struggle to defend the right and interest of their members.

5.1.3. The Role of *Voice of Labor* in Union Education

Voice of Labour was a newspaper published by the Education Department of the national confederation. It has been published intermittently since July 1963. It is nearly as old as the national confederation itself. The first volume was published on 8 July 1963 (*Hämlè* 1, 1955EC).³² Then, it continued to be published every 15 days until the publication of Vol.VII/ No. 3 on 15 July 1969 (*Hämlè* 8, 1961EC); after that, it came out monthly.³³ In those early years, it came out in a bulletin format than as a newspaper. Article 15 of the first constitution of CELU, for instance, stated that "...የሠራተኛ ድምጽ ተብሎ የሚወጣው የማህበሩ መጽሔት በየአስራ አምስት ቀን አንዴ እየታተመ ይወጣል። የማህበሩ ዋና ጸሐፊ መጽሔቶችን ለአባል ድርጅቶች እንደከፍቻቸው መጠን ድርሻቸውን ይልከላቸዋል።"³⁴ It also stipulated that the headline of the bulletin should often reflect the objective of the organization. The constitution also encouraged each basic union to choose one member who could report the activities of the union to the editor of the *Voice of Labour*. While members were allowed to buy the newspaper for only 10 cents, non-members were required to pay 15 cents.³⁵

³¹ AETU, "A Report of the 2nd Regular Meeting of the General Council of AETU," March 1983, p. 13.

³² *Voice of Labour*, Vol. I, No. 1, *Hämlè* 1, 1955EC (8 July 1963).

³³ *Voice of Labour*, Vol. VII, No. 3, *Hämlè* 8, 1961EC (15 July 1969).

³⁴ "...The organization bulletin called the voice of labour is published every 15 days. The General Secretary of the organization would send the bulletin to member unions as per their payment." See also "The Constitution of CELU," April 1963.

³⁵ *Ibid*,

The first three volumes of the *Voice of Labour* were published in Amharic. Eventually, the English version began to be incorporated and all volumes starting from Vol. I/No. 4 of August 1963 to Vol. XI/ No. 6 of August 1974 were published both in Amharic and English languages. The *Voice of Labour* was renamed as the "Voice of the All Ethiopian Trade Unions" from October 1977 to May 1986 and the "Voice of Ethiopian Trade Unions" from June 1986 to May 1991.³⁶ After the downfall of the *Därg* regime, however, CETU has continued to publish its news paper with the former name, *Voice of Labour*.

The *Voice of Labour* was created mainly to serve as a medium of communication between the national confederation and local/basic trade unions. It was one of the platforms where all labour activities were raised and trade union members took lesson from one another to develop their unions. It also served as an important media for workers to express their demand or resentment to the government. This was clearly stated in the first issue of the *Voice of Labour*. In this volume, the purpose of the news paper was stated as: "...የሠራተኛ ወገን በአሠሪዎች ላይ ያለውን ስሜት የሚያስፍርበት፣ በየጊዜው በአገር ውስጥ ሆነ በውጭ አገር ሠራተኞች መካከል ያለውን ዜና የሚያስማበት፣ እንዲሁም ከመላው ህዝብ ጋር የሚተዋወቅበት ጽሁፍ ነው።"³⁷ In his message written on the special issue of the *Voice of Labour* the president of CELU also noted that the news paper was going to be considered as an official organ of communication for the Ethiopian workers. Moreover, he encouraged affiliated unions to do all they could to make it an effective organ of communication.³⁸

³⁶*Voice of the All Ethiopian Trade Unions*, Vol. I, No.1, *Teqmet* 1970 (October 1977); *Voice of All Ethiopian Trade Unions*, Vol. I, No.1, *June* 1978 (October 1986).

³⁷"... A paper on which the workers put their attitude about the management, convey the news that emanated among both local and international trade unions and get to know with the general public." See also, *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, *Hämlè* 1, 1955EC (08 July 1963) p, 1.

³⁸*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, 1970, p. 10.

Besides its service as a medium of communication between CELU and local unions, the *Voice of Labour* played indispensable role in educating the industrial labour force about the nature and modus operandi of trade unions. It often featured on its front page issues of the national confederation. It also dealt with the history of Ethiopian labor movement, major provisions of the constitution of CELU, strikes, experiences of individual workers and the praxis of selected international trade unions. Thus, the newspaper did not only enhance the awareness of workers about their unions but also encouraged them to strengthen their solidarity and struggle in defiance of their class interests. Nevertheless, because of the small number of staff members, logistic constraints, and lack of interest on the part of member workers to write the activities of their unions and send to the editor, the newspaper had its own shortcomings.

Following the coming to power of the *Därg* regime and the reorganization of CETU as AETU, the *Voice of Labour* was also renamed as the *Voice of AETU* in October 1977. Like CELU, AETU used the newspaper as a means of communication with its affiliated unions. The newspaper was also used to disseminate government propaganda to the workers. In addition, it gave much coverage to issues related to union education. For instance, resolutions of the General Congress, General Council and executive committee of AETU were often featured on the front page of the newspaper. It also gave coverage to the history of Ethiopian labour movement, international trade unions, collective agreements and constitution of AETU.³⁹ Nevertheless, since the newspaper did not yet have enough skilled manpower and was not equipped with the pertinent technology, its role in union education could not be as significant as it was expected.

³⁹*Voice of All Ethiopian Trade Unions*, Vol. I, No. 1, *Teqmet* 1970 (October 1977).

In December 1983, however, experts in MoLSA studied the problem of the newspaper and created a new organizational structure, with adequate staff and materials to improve its format and sustain its publication. It also changed the format of the newspaper. The government argued that the newspaper should often preach the supremacy of the working class. It further stated that: "...በመደብ በተከፋፈሉ ሥርዓቶች ውስጥ እንደሚኖሩት ርዕዮታለማዊ ቅርጾች ጋዜጦችም የመደብ ይዘት አላቸው።...ከታላቁ አብዮታችን ወዲህ ግን የሠራተኛውን መደብ የበላይነትና የሰው ልጆችን እኩልነት ያስተጋባሉ።"⁴⁰ Regardless of the improvement of the quality of the newspaper and the incorporation of several columns that could educate workers about the *modus operandi* of their unions, they ended up for political end. For instance the ideology and international columns were mainly devoted to indoctrinate workers with Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism. In general, had it been appropriately used by the government to educate the workers, it would have brought significant changes in union education. Nevertheless, since most of the columns were devoted to current affairs and routine activities of the organization and local unions, its contribution to union education was insignificant.

5.2. Workers' Education

Workers' education refers to any educational activity aimed at the educational attainment of the working people. It constitutes programs related to literacy, numeracy and other general education activities, including vocational training. This kind of education is given to workers who are illiterate and depend only on their skills to earn their living. It aims at helping them at least to be

⁴⁰ "...In a system divided among classes, news papers have class basis like every forms of ideology. ...Since our great revolution, however, they echoed the supremacy of the proletariats and equality of all human beings." See also CELU, Box No.282, File No. 01; Yāmälaw Itēyopiya Yäsaratäñoč mahebär, "Yämäeisäma Gazēta Zegjet Mäwaqer ena Yäsera Mämäria, Tahesas 1976 EC," p. 1.

able to sign for their salary, understand the orders of their bosses and live a programmed life. It also helps workers to develop their skills and get a better position and pay in their work.⁴¹

Since most of the Ethiopian workers and some trade union leaders were illiterate, CELU primarily engaged in providing literacy education and vocational training to workers across the country. It started a campaign to eradicate illiteracy among the workers with the help of secondary, college and university students, the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, the Ministry of National Community Development (MNCD) and the National Literacy Campaign Association. Moreover, it began to give vocational training to workers to upgrade their skills. The vocational training was given in cooperation with AALC, Täfäri Mäkonän School, Asmāra Technical College and Addis Ababa Building College.⁴²

CELU played a central role in the delivery of workers' education by coordinating workers, instructors, government institutions, employers and international trade unions. When CELU identified pertinent workers for education or training from various plants and brought them to the training center, the government provided classes and assigned instructors. International trade unions and employers also contributed to the delivery of workers' education, the former by providing financial support and the latter by giving leave to the workers ahead of time for classes.

⁴¹International Labour Organization (ILO) Bureau for Labour Activities, "The Role of Trade Unions in Workers' Education: The Key to Trade Union Capacity Building," *A Background Paper Presented in International Workers' Symposium in Geneva, 8–12 October 2007*, p. 1.

⁴²*Voice of Labour*, 9 April 1970, p.16; Tamrat Bekele, "The Emergence of Labour Unions and Government Policy in Ethiopia," MA Thesis, California State University: Department of Business Administration,

5.2.1. General Education

This type of workers' education refers to educational activities related to mainly literacy and numeracy. It was designed to enable union members to read, write and compute. It was a fundamental educational program for most of the workers and some union leaders who were illiterate or had no educational background. Since its establishment, CELU had realized this problem and began to try to resolve it by imparting general education. In its news paper, for instance, CELU expressed the extent of illiteracy among the workers as "...ዛሬ በሃያኛው መቶ ክፍለ ዘመን ዓለም በመስልጠን የኩክሌር ደረጃ በደረሰበት ወቅት ቁጥራቸው በርከት ያሉ ሰራተኞቻችን የወር አበላቸውን በአውራጣታቸው ሲቀበሉ ይታያሉ።"⁴³

True, the national literacy campaign to eradicate illiteracy from all sections of the population, including the workers, was already started before the establishment of CELU. The national literacy campaign was initiated through the imperial decree of 1955 that guaranteed universal fundamental education for all.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the actual work was started with the establishment of "*Yä Behèrawi Fidäl Särawit Mahebär*" (literally "Association of the National Army for the Alphabet" or as most scholars used to call it, "The National Literacy Campaign Association") on 21 July 1962 (*Hämlè* 14, 1954 EC). It was organized by some notable high government officials to eradicate illiteracy from the country. It had also Emperor Haile Selassie I as its patron and *Märed Azmač* Asefawossän, the crown prince of Ethiopia, as its honorary president and the patriarch and the prime minister as honorary members of the Board. It was established as a non profit voluntary organization to liberate the population from the fetter of

⁴³"...Today, in the 20th century when the world is at the nuclear age, a number of workers are seen taking their salary by signing with their thumb." See also Voice of Labour, Vol. 1 No. 3, *Nähäse* 4, 1955EC (10 August 1963).

⁴⁴Neway WeldeTsadik, "Adult Education and Literacy Campaign," A paper presented at the education sector review seminar, 1972, p. 2.; Germa Amare, "An Appraisal of the On-Going Literacy Campaign in Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2/3, 1991, p. 75, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43660091>.

illiteracy.⁴⁵ On the occasion, the emperor unequivocally expressed the relationship between education and development in the country. He noted that "...National development and progress is possible only when the entire population has attained fundamental education, and when the government is an active participant in the cause."⁴⁶ The organization adopted "*Temhret Lähulum*" or "Education for All" as its guiding motto. Every individual irrespective of age, sex, religion or occupation was encouraged to be able to write and read Amharic.⁴⁷ Voluntary teachers for the various literacy centers were recruited from the secondary school, college and university students and educated individuals from business firms. They provided the service during the summer and their spare time.⁴⁸

Even though a number of ministries and institutions worked with the organization, the MNCD, particularly, took adult literacy as part of its development endeavor and worked hand in hand with it. True, the MNCD was already instituted to guide, organize and coordinate rural development activities including provision of basic education, literacy. Thus, it began to work in cooperation with the literacy organization since its establishment. During the celebration of the adult literacy day in Ada'a on 23 April 1964, for instance, Gètahun Täsäma, the minister of MNCD noted that literacy was important for all people regardless of their age, social status and occupations. He further added that: "...የማንበብና የመጻፍ ችሎታ ለጥቂት ዕድላችን የሚተው አይደለም። ለገበሬ ሆነ ለአናጢ፤ ለግምብኛም ሆነ ለቀን ሠራተኛ፤ በጠቅላላው ለማንም ሰው አስፈላጊ የሆነ መሳሪያነው።"⁴⁹ This clearly indicated that the MNCD was expanding the literacy campaign not only among the rural population but

⁴⁵Teshome G.Wagaw, "Appraisal of Adult Literacy Programs in Ethiopia," *Journal of Reading*, Vol. 21, No. 6, March 1978, p. 505; Sereke Y.B, *National Literacy Campaign*, (Addis Ababa, 1965), p. 5; Germa Amare, "An Appraisal of the On-Going Literacy Campaign in Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2/3, 1991, p. 75

⁴⁶Sereke Y.B, *National Literacy Campaign*, (Addis Ababa, 1965), p. 5.

⁴⁷*Ibid*, p.7; MNCD, *Temhert Lähulum*, (Addis Ababa, 1957 EC), p. 2.

⁴⁸Teshome, p. 5.

⁴⁹"...Reading and writing skills are not to be left for a few privileged. They are all important instruments for any individual who may be either a farmer or a carpenter or a construction worker or a day labourer." See also MNCD, *Temhert lähulum*, (Addis Ababa, 1957 EC), p. 9.

also among the workers in various plants. Even though the MNCD as a ministry responsible for labour played an important role in expanding the literacy campaign among the working class, CELU had also been working on labour education as its primary task to improve the standard of education of its members since its establishment. It also embarked on literacy campaign to eradicate illiteracy among the workers as its major undertaking. To this end, it began to work in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts and the National Literacy Campaign Association. While the former arranged schools and instructors, the latter provided educational material.⁵⁰

The program was undertaken for three months during summer when secondary school, college and university students who were serving as voluntary instructors were on vacation.⁵¹ Beginning in the summer of 1963, the literacy program continued to be undertaken on a continuing basis and liberated many workers from illiteracy. CELU also continued to regard it as its primary task and became one of the main agents of the movement.⁵²

It was first started in Addis Ababa at Bāyānā Māred School with 113 workers who came from different plants in Addis Ababa and two university students as voluntary instructors. In its news paper CELU noted that "... ማኅበርተኛው ሙሉ ተከፋይነት እንዲኖረው ስለሚሰራው ሁሉ ማወቅና መማር ይኖርበታል። በዚህ መሰረት ይህ ድርጅት ከኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት መንግሥት የትምህርትና ሥነጥበብ ሚኒስትቴር በመግባባት ሰራተኞች ከሥራ በሚወጡበት ጊዜ እንዲማሩ በትርፍ ጊዜአቸው በራሳቸው በጎ ፈቃድ ወንድሞቻቸውን ለመርዳት በሚፈልጉ አስተማሪዎች በበየነ መርዕድ ትምህርት ቤት የትምህርት ጎዳና ተከፍቷል።"⁵³

⁵⁰*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 3, *Nähāsè* 4, 1955EC (10 August 1963).

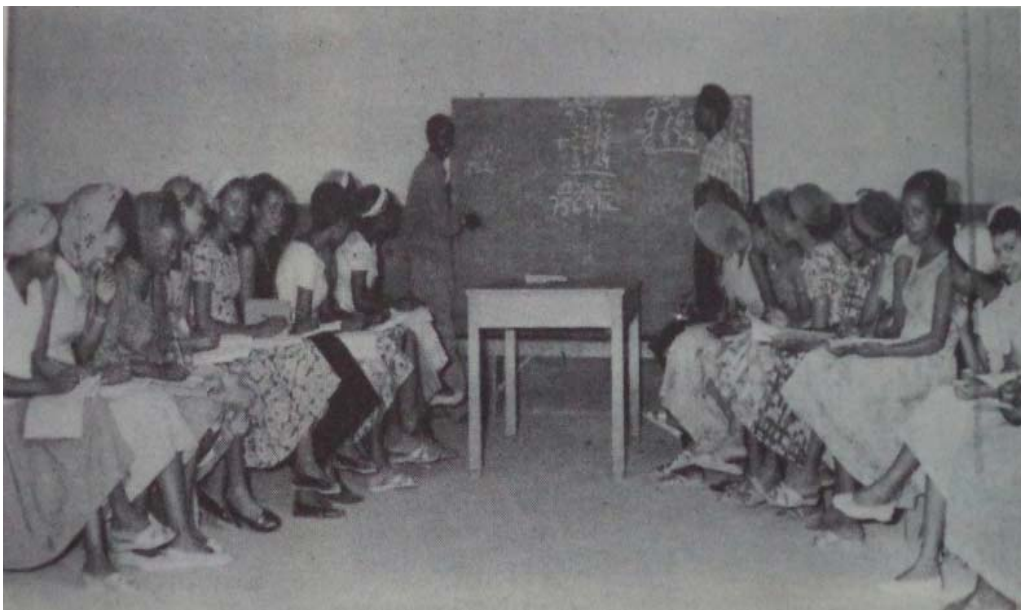
⁵¹Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p.187.

⁵²Robert L. Hess, *Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy* (London: Cornell University Press, 1970), p .84.

⁵³"...Every worker has to learn and know about his work so as to participate in the undertaking with his/her full capacity. To this end, this organization [CELU] in cooperation with the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts and voluntary instructors who wanted to help their brothers in their spare time opened an

The literacy campaign eventually expanded to various industrial plants outside Addis Ababa. In the summer of 1969, for instance, CELU deployed 12 University students to instruct workers in the major industrial plants in Asmāra, Dire Dawa, Dābrā Berhan, Baher Dar, Wonji-Šāwa and Aqaqi. The National Literacy Campaign Association played an important role by setting up classes and administering the whole program.⁵⁴ Moreover, the association encouraged workers and basic trade unions to actively participate in the campaign and realize the dream of making each factory free from illiteracy. On one occasion, for instance, General Tadässā Berru, the first Director of the association awarded certificates for trainees at Wonji-Šāwa and urged them to fight against illiteracy by imparting their knowledge to their fellow workers.⁵⁵

Figure 5.2. Dire Dawa Textile Factory Workers' attending Literacy Class



Source: *Voice of Labour, Nāhāsè*, 1958EC (August, 1966)

education opportunity for workers to learn after work at Bāyānā Māred School." See also *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 3, *Nāhāsè* 4, 1955EC (10 August 1963).

⁵⁴*Voice Labour*, Vol.7, No.4, *Nāhāsè* 1961 EC (August 1969).

⁵⁵Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p.187.

CELU's literacy program liberated a number of workers from the shackles of illiteracy. Most of the trainees managed to finish the program and were able to write, read and compute. At the summer of 1969, for instance, CELU awarded certificates to 2000 workers who successfully completed the program. They were drawn from the major industrial enterprises of Asmāra, Dire Dawa, Baher Dar and Aqaqi.⁵⁶ The total number of trade union members and their families who successfully completed the literacy program across the country reached 5025 in the summer of 1969.⁵⁷ In 1970, CELU was nominated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for one of its prizes, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (Emperor of Iran) together with *Yämesrač Demše* (one of the largest non-governmental literacy ventures conducted by the Evangelical *Mäkanä Eyäsus* Church in Ethiopia) for their meritorious work in literacy. True, the National Literacy Campaign Association had been awarded a third place medal and certificate from UNESCO in 1967 for its achievement in literacy.⁵⁸

Following the coming to power of the *Därg*, a new literacy program was launched across the country. The government decided to conduct a literacy program so as to consolidate the new political system. As a result, it issued Proclamation No.11 of 1974 which was known as “Development through Cooperation, Enlightenment and work Campaign” or commonly called *Zämäča (campaign)* on 25 November 1974. According to Article 3/2, the proclamation aimed at implementing literacy program and technical training among the general public. It further noted that "...in cooperation with the appropriate Public Authorities and as much as possible, to conduct literacy programs and give basic agricultural, health, technical and other social work

⁵⁶CETU, Box No.22, File No. 03, A Report by the Department of Education to CELU on 22 November 1969. It deals about the major activities it carried out in the previous year.

⁵⁷*Voice of Labour*, Miyazeya 1, 1962 EC (April, 9, 1970), p.16; Tamrat, p. 63.

⁵⁸Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p.187.

education for the broader masses."⁵⁹ Nevertheless, since the literacy program was implemented together with other development endeavors which focused on rural areas, and trade unions were not yet organized in line with the principle of socialism, the program ended without meeting its targets among the entire population in general and the working class in particular.

Since the Development through Cooperation, Enlightenment and Work Campaign was a multi purpose venture and failed to achieve the literacy program, the government started a new comprehensive literacy campaign, the National Literacy Campaign, on 8 July 1979. It was the most extensive literacy program carried out during the *Därg* Regime.⁶⁰ Like other government agencies, AETU played an important role in the successful implementation of the program. During this campaign, besides Secondary School, College and University students, the previously trained workers took responsibility to train their fellow workers in several plants. Even some workers who had better education background participated as instructors outside their plant in several rural *qäbällès*.⁶¹

In general, the state and trade unions actively participated in the literacy program so as to eradicate illiteracy among the working class. This further inspired the workers to work hard and improve their standard of living. Moreover, it helped them to actively participate in every undertaking in which they were involved. It also helped them to easily grasp the instructions of the management and implement it in their work.

⁵⁹*Nägarit Gazèta*, 34th Year, No. 10, Proclamation No. 11/1974, *Hedar* 16, 1967EC (25 November 1974).

⁶⁰Germa Amare, "An Appraisal of the On-Going Literacy...", p. 81; Fiqreselassie Wogdres, *Eñña ena Abyotu* (Lose Angeles; Addis Ababa: Tsehai Publisher, 2006 EC/2014), p. 424.

⁶¹*Voice of AETU*, *Genbot* 1972 EC (May 1980); Fesseha Dästa, *Abyotu ena Tezetayè* (Los Angeles; Addis Ababa: Tsehay Publishers, 2008EC/2015) p. 312.

5.2.2. Vocational Training

Among the major areas of workers' education that CELU embarked on was vocational training. Realizing the country's need for skilled workers, CELU, with the help of African American Labour Center (AALC) started a vocational training program in May 1968. Before CELU launched the program, most of its members acquired their skills through experience or continuous practice in their work. Regarding this, for instance, CELU noted that: "...አብዛኛው በሙያው የተሰማሩት ሠራተኞች ያላቸው ጥበብ በትምህርት ቤት ስለሙያቸው የተማሩት ሳይሆን በልምድ በሥራ ቦታ የገበዩት ነው። ስለዚህም ሥራውን በልምድ ይሠሩታል እንጂ ስለሥራው ጠለቅ ያለ ዕውቀት የላቸውም።"⁶² Thus, CELU aimed to fill both the theoretical and practical handicaps of the workers through a vocational training program that was designed and delivered to workers after office hours. Following the opening of the program at different technical schools and colleges, however, workers began to communicate easily with those who were employed directly from Colleges and Universities.⁶³

CELU decided to establish a vocational training program for its members mainly to build the capacity of its members and to improve their living standard, supplement the theoretical knowledge which they did not get at school, make them cope with the changes in technology and make them keep up with the increasingly changing technological developments, and prepare Ethiopians to take over the position of expatriates in various plants. In addition, since the expatriate employers so far failed to give higher positions for Ethiopians on account of the fact that they did not possess a Diploma or Certificate from any institution of vocational education, CELU decided to launch the program to overcome this problem. To this end, the confederation

⁶²"...The skills that most workers have are not gained from school; rather they are gained through workplace experience. Thus, they do the job based on their experience, but have no any deep knowledge about it." See also *Voice of Labour*, Special Issue on the 10th Anniversary of CELU on *Miyazeya* 1965 EC (April 1973), p. 20.

⁶³Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p.185.

decided that after attending a year of training in CELU's vocational training program, workers would be awarded a certificate in the areas of their expertise (trade). The certificate in turn would boost their morale and enable them to compete with those coming directly from school.⁶⁴ It was with all these expectations that CELU embarked on delivering vocational training for its members.

Nevertheless, though CELU envisaged the necessity of the program for its members, it did not have the capacity to implement it. Thus, it started to work with the Ministry of National Community Development (MNCD), Ministry of Education and Fine Arts (MoE), Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF), the African American Labour Center (AALC) and International Labour Organizations(ILO)for the realization of the program. The AALC contributed a lot to implement the program by providing financial support and sending its experts. The program was started with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Băyănă Solomon, the president of CELU, on the one hand and Irving Brown, the director of AALC, on the other on 25 May 1965. Accordingly, AALC sent its labour expert, John Gore, the organization's Eastern African representative to Ethiopia, to conduct a need assessment survey and develop an action plan to launch the program.⁶⁵ The survey indicated that CELU and its affiliates had a number of problems which needed to be fixed. Among others, lack of labour educators, poor union leadership, lack of adequate skills, lack of enough housing and gender problems were mentioned as major lacunas of CELU and its affiliates.⁶⁶

⁶⁴CETU, Box No. 9, File No, 01, CELU's press release on the performance of the CELU-AALC vocational training program on *Ter* 3,1964 EC (12 January1972).

⁶⁵CETU, Box No. 9, File No.01, A memorandum of understanding signed between CELU and AALC on 25 May 1965.

⁶⁶Tewodros Seyoum, "A History of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (1962-1975)," MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 2012, p.50.

As per the finding of the survey, the AALC agreed to give financial support and send experts to solve the aforementioned bottlenecks of CELU. Thus, a tripartite agreement was signed in late 1967 by Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaël, the Director of the Department of Education at CELU, Charles Taylor, a labour expert from AALC, and Dr. Fortiyo, the Director of Täfäri Mäkonän School, to establish an auto mechanic training center at the school.⁶⁷

Täfäri Mäkonän School provided the class rooms, the teachers and the workshops while CELU in cooperation with AALC bought the necessary teaching materials and agreed to pay the teachers. The training would be given for three hours a day and three days a week. The first three months were planned to be devoted to theoretical discussions in the classroom and the rest of the year to be spent on practical training. Those who successfully completed the training would be awarded certificates by the confederation.⁶⁸

In 1968, thirteen workers from Mitchell Cotts Company, Säfärian Company and Amropa Motors Company were selected by their trade union leaders to start the first CELU and AALC sponsored auto-mechanics training at Täfäri Mäkonän School. A year later, ten out of the thirteen passed their written and practical exams and were awarded certificates.⁶⁹ Though limited in number, CELU continued to train workers recruited from its affiliates in auto mechanics from 1968 to 1974. Nevertheless, lack of appropriate classrooms and workshops continued to be the major challenge of the training until CELU with the help of AALC constructed its own building inside the school in 1973.

⁶⁷Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p.186.

⁶⁸*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue at the 7th Year Anniversary of CELU, *Miyazeya* 1, 1962 EC (9 April 1970); A Report from the Education Department of CELU to the Executives of CELU on Major Educational Activities on *Hedar* 13, 1962 EC (22 November 1969).p.16.

⁶⁹*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue on the 10th Anniversary of CELU on *Miyazeya* 1965 EC (April 1973), p.

Table 7 -Number of Workers who Received Training in Auto-Mechanics at Täfäri Mäkonän School from 1968/69-1973/74.

Budget Year	Number of Workers/Trainees Registered for the Training	Number of Workers/Trainees who Successfully Completed the Training
1968/69	13	10
1969/70	15	12
1970/71	19	18
1971/72	15	15
1972/73	18	16
1973/74	26	24
Total	106	95

Source: *Voice of Labour*, Special Issue on the 10th Anniversary of CELU on *Miyazeya* 1965 EC (April 1973), p. 20

Regardless of the small size of the trainees, CELU faced a lot of problems in running such a program. Since the program was new to CELU, it had to redesign the curriculum in collaboration with the school to make it suit the trainees. It had also to translate the teaching material into Amharic so that the workers could easily understand it, and assist the school in finding the appropriate teachers for the course. Moreover, since the trainees were workers who had the burden of heavy full-time work during the day, CELU had to approach their respective employers to let them leave ahead of their normal finishing time. In general, though CELU was preoccupied with problems after problems at the beginning of the program, many of the

problems were eventually solved in cooperation with the employers and the government, and the training began to be run smoothly.⁷⁰

As mentioned previously, CELU had shortages of classrooms and workshops. Thus, it planned to build its own building which would house both classes and workshops to allow more trainees in the program. In 1971, CELU signed another agreement with AALC to build an auto mechanic workshop inside the school. It was hoped that the new workshop would enable the confederation to provide vocational training program to as many members as possible. The building was planned to house a big workshop which would have a capacity of holding five air-cooled engines and five water-cooled engines and five auto body work. The building was also planned to have one class room, one storage room, and an office for the teachers and wash rooms. The workshop would also have the capacity to run courses in auto body, repair and welding. CELU allowed the school to use this workshop during the day time while CELU could use it in the evening and during vacations. In doing so, CELU contributed its share to the government's endeavor to provide quality education to the regular students. After the building was constructed, it was expected to train 45 workers in auto mechanics and auto body repair every year.⁷¹

Interestingly enough, the workshop was built by workers who were receiving training in the building trade. Thus, the workers in the building trade were trained while building a workshop which would be used to train auto mechanics trainees. Nearly 60% of the work of the building of the workshop was done by the trainees in the building college. The rest was given to a contractor

⁷⁰CETU, Box No. 9, File No. 01, CELU's press release on the performance of the CELU-AALC vocational training program on *Ter* 3,1964 EC (12 January1972); CETU, Box No. 22, File No. 03, A Report from the Education Department of CELU to the Executives of CELU on Major Educational Activities on *Hedar* 13, 1962 EC (22 November 1969).

⁷¹CETU, Box No. 9, File No. 01, CELU's press release on the performance of the CELU-AALC vocational training program on *Ter* 3,1964 EC (12 January1972); *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 8, No. 8, July 1971.

who was a graduate of CELU's building trade course in the college of building technology. The building was concluded and inaugurated on 11 October 1973.⁷²

Figure 5.3. An Auto Mechanic Workshop Built by CELU in Cooperation with AALC at Täfäri Mäkonän School.



Source: Photo by the Author

In order to provide the same opportunity to others, CELU also found it necessary to design a program of vocational training in the building trade. In 1970, workers were selected from different construction and similar firms to attend the first building trade vocational training course in carpentry, masonry, and concrete work at the College of Building Technology. It consisted of ten students per class. The College provided the class rooms, the teachers and the workshops while CELU in cooperation with AALC bought the necessary teaching materials and

⁷²CETU, Box No. 9, File No, 01, CELU's press release on the performance of the CELU-AALC vocational training program on *Ter* 3, 1964 EC (12 January 1972)

provided payment for teachers. Three months of classroom training was given and the rest of the year was spent on practical training. Under the supervision of the Building College instructors, the workers were able to build a two floor house, thus demonstrating the skill they have acquired in the year. At the end of the year, after passing written and practical exams, 26 out of 30 workers were able to receive certificates from the president of HSIU, Dr. Aklilu Häbtè.⁷³

In 1971, the courses were expanded to include plumbing and electricity and the number of trainees was nearly doubled. The training continued until 1974 with the assistance of AALC. In those years, a total of 183 workers graduated in five trades.

Table 8 -Number of Workers who received Training in Building Trades at the College of Building Technology from 1970-1974.

Budget Year	Number of Workers/Trainees Registered for the Training	Number of Workers/Trainees who Successfully Completed the Training
1969/70	30	26
1970/71	54	51
1971/72	50	46
1972/73	38	36
1973/74	28	24
Total	200	183

Source: *Voice of Labour*, Special Issue on the 10th Anniversary of CELU on *Miyazeya* 1965 EC (April 1973), pp.20-21.

⁷³CETU, Box No. 9, File No, 01, CELU's press release on the performance of the CELU-AALC vocational training program on *Ter* 3,1964 EC (12 January1972).

In addition, CELU opened the third vocational training center at Asmāra Technical School in October 1971. It began to provide vocational training to workers coming from several factories in and around Asmāra. The training was given in six different departments such as machine, Auto Mechanic, Radio Maintenance, Carpentry, Electricity, and Metal work and Plumbing. A total of 54 workers in 1972, 95 workers in 1973 and 115 in 1974 were graduated from the third CELU's training center.⁷⁴

In general, CELU's vocational training programs showed significant progress until the outbreak of the 1974 revolution. A significant number of workers received training and were able to improve their standard of living. On the other hand, as the number of skilled workers increased in industrial plants, its production would also increase. Regarding the progress and value of vocational training, CELU noted that: "...የኢሠክማ የመርሃ ሙያ ትምህርት ፕሮግራም ከአመት ወደ አመት መልካም ስምን አትርፏል። ከዛም ተመርቀው የወጡ ሰራተኞች በጥበባቸው የሚተማመኑ በስራ ቦታቸው የተመሰገኑ ሆነው ተገኝተዋል። ሠራተኛ ራሱን በትርፍ ጊዜ በማሰልጠን የኑሮ ደረጃውን የሚያሻሽል መሆኑን ማሳየት ለመላው ሰራተኛ ትልቅ የተሰፋ በር የሚከፍት መልካም አርአያ ሆኖ ተገኝቷል።"⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the success of CELU's vocational training program could not be attributed only to the endeavor of the confederation. It was rather the result of the coordinated efforts of CELU, government agencies and private institutions. For instance, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of National Community Development allowed CELU to use public institutions for vocational training courses in TMS, the College of Building Technology and Asmāra Technical School. The Ethiopian Employers' Federation and the respective employers also played their

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 21; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 8, No. 8, *Hämlè* 1963 EC (July, 1971).

⁷⁵"...CELU's vocational training program had been acquiring a good reputation from year to year, and the workers who graduated from it were becoming the real commanders of their skills and gaining respect at their place of work. The demonstration that workers showed through training indicated that the program would undoubtedly improve their standard of living and opened a new horizon of hope to all workers." See also

own part by providing moral support and by allowing workers to leave work before time respectively. AALC also provided CELU with an expert, all necessary materials and financial assistance for the program. Thus, it can be argued that trade unions, the state and some private institutions and international trade unions played an important role in educating the industrial labour force in Ethiopia.⁷⁶

Following the coming to power of the *Därg* regime, however, CELU's vocational training program began to face serious setbacks. The program encountered serious financial constraints after the government expelled major international sponsors, ICFTU, AALC and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung out of the country in October 1975.⁷⁷ Thus, the responsibility of providing vocational training program was left to the employers at plant level. But, since it was given as an apprenticeship for few weeks and could not give certificate for the trainees, such trainings had more value to the employers than the workers.

After the reorganization of CELU as AETU on the basis of the principles of socialism, however, a number of workers began to get scholarships in several socialist countries and attended vocational training in different trades. Among others, USSR, Bulgaria, German Democratic Republic, Cuba, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia provided scholarships for Ethiopian workers to get vocational training in their labour institutes. For instance, the Peoples Republic of Bulgaria gave scholarships for 210 Ethiopian workers to study different trades for about five years from 1986-1990.⁷⁸

⁷⁶*Voice of Labour*, Vol. VIII, No. 8 *Hämlè*, 1963 (July, 1971).

⁷⁷All Ethiopian Trade Unions, "AETU and International Trade Unions (in Amharic), June, 1982," p. 32.

⁷⁸MoLSA, Box No.7, File No. 5.2/0 2/1, It deals with the 210 Ethiopians who got scholarships from Bulgaria.

In general, the responsibility of training workers was not entirely left to CELU. It was rather a common responsibility which was shared by the government, employers and the community at large. The training program mainly aimed at improving the living standard of CELU members. In doing so, employers or the government also benefited from skilled workers who were able to increase the productivity of the industry. Workers who attended the vocational training also became self confident and productive in their work places. Thus, the training program not only benefited those who got the opportunity but also created hope to so many workers who had been wishing to get such an opportunity and improve their living standards.

5.3. Labour Studies

In addition to providing literacy education and vocational training to workers and developing their knowledge and understanding about the function of their trade unions, CELU made several attempts to impart education related to the general economic and social problems of the country to union leaders and workers.⁷⁹ This type of labour education is known as labour studies. It also deals with unemployment, macroeconomics, migration, turnover, trade unions and the society, etc. In its report presented to the General Congress held from 18-20 April 1972, CELU noted that it had already started to instruct workers about the national socio-economic conditions. It further asserted that "...በተጨማሪም ሠራተኞች የጠቅላላ የብሔራዊ ችግር ጠለቅ ብሎ እንዲገባቸው በማለት የሠራተኛን የዘላቂታ አቋም የሚመለከቱ እንደ ሥራ ፈትነት ችግር እንደ ሠራተኛ ማህበር እና ሕብረተሰቡ ያሉ አርዕስቶች ለማህበራተኞች በትምህት ገቢታ መቅረብ ጀምረዋል።"⁸⁰ The delivery of this kind of labour education involved the open, impartial

⁷⁹*Voice of Labour*, April, 9, 1970, p.16; Tamrat, p. 63.

⁸⁰ "... In addition, for workers to deeply understand the national problems themes related to their strategic interests like problems of unemployment and trade unions and the general public were already begun to be give as part of labour education." See also A Report Presented by the president of CELU to the General Congress which was held from 18-20 April 1962.

and critical study of labour in society, as practiced by universities and research institutions. It also demanded workers to be analytical to grasp education related to labour studies.⁸¹

Regardless of CELU's repeated attempts to instruct its members about labour studies, it was the least implemented types of labour education among the Ethiopian workers as compared to union and workers' education. There were two major reasons for the failure of CELU to develop labour studies. Primarily, since the MNCD and other state agencies were responsible for conducting labour studies, the role of CELU was insignificant in this regard. Thus, it did not actively embark on delivering labour studies education to its members. Secondly, as the organizational structure of most of the affiliated trade unions was very weak and also staffed with illiterate workers, it gave priority to union and workers' education rather than labour studies.⁸²

True, education related to labour studies had begun to be given to government officials a year before CELU was organized in order to know the country's skilled manpower and manage unemployment. It was arranged in cooperation with ILO to provide government officials employed in various departments and expected to assume responsibilities for labour affairs with a general introductory training in labour relations, manpower and employment problems. To this end, two ILO experts, Professor J. Henry Richardson and Mr. Robert Jones, conducted a seminar in the aforementioned themes from 6 August to 14 October 1962. Integrated with this course,

⁸¹International Labour Organization (ILO) Bureau for Labour Activities, "The role of trade unions in workers' education: The key to trade union capacity building," A Background Paper presented in International Workers' Symposium in Geneva, 8–12 October 2007, p.1.

⁸²Tamrat, pp. 63-64.

lectures were given by government officials on the Ethiopian Constitution, system of government, economic and labour conditions and labour legislation.⁸³

Thus, one can argue that though education related to labour studies was given due attention by Western trade unions which had strong institutions, CELU, AETU and ETU failed to deliver labour studies to their members as much as they did on union and workers' education. They rather left this responsibility to state agencies and institutions of the country.

Conclusion

Labour education was one of the major activities that brought trade unions and the state to work together for mutual benefit. As the capacity of workers was enhanced with education, it would ultimately increase industrial production. This in turn brought additional payment to workers too. Since its establishment, for instance, CELU embarked on labour education as its primary objective. It delivered union education and workers' education to its members through seminars, short term trainings and scholarships. CELU engaged in educating its members mainly to strengthen affiliated unions and build the capacity of their members to improve their standard of living.

The state supported education in general and labour education in particular to build workers' capacity and increase industrial production. The Imperial Government of Ethiopia, for instance, considered education as the core engine of any development. As the 1st, 2nd and the 3rd five year development plans developed by the imperial regime clearly demonstrated, due attention was

⁸³ILO and Imperial Government of Ethiopia, "Seminar on Industrial Relations, Manpower and Employment Services from August to October 1962" Unpublished, 1962, p.1.

given to labour education not only to meet its development objectives but also to replace expatriates with skillful Ethiopian workers.

Similarly, the *Därg* regime which took over power in 1974 continued to embark on education to meet its development objectives. For instance, it declared "Development through Cooperation, Enlightenment and Work Campaign" in 1974 and National Literacy Campaign in 1979 and developed the capacity of the population in general and the working class in particular. Though the campaign focused on the rural population, the working class benefited a lot especially during the second campaign. So as to indoctrinate the working class with Marxism-Leninism, the regime provided educational opportunities for workers.

While CELU recruited workers and arranged the whole platform, the government provided classes and assigned labour experts and university instructors. The government also facilitated scholarships for workers. International trade unions and employers also played an important role in educating the industrial labour force by providing financial support and arranging their working hours respectively. In general, trade unions and the state contributed a lot in the development of the labour relations of the country by providing union education, workers' education and labour studies to union members.

EPILOGUE

TRADE UNIONS AFTER THE DOWNFALL OF THE DÄRG REGIME

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of different guerrilla movements and liberation fronts that was dominated by the Tegray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), defeated the *Därg* regime and controlled Addis Ababa on 28 May 1991. This heralded the end of the *Därg*'s 17 years military rule in Ethiopia. Even though EPRDF had been advocating socialism during the armed struggle, it eventually shifted to free market economy after it controlled power. The global shift of power in favor capitalism than socialism apparently forced it to embrace the language of democracy and free market economy. The introduction of free market economy and privatization of industries in turn demanded the reorganization of trade unions which were organized in the socialist model.¹ Thus, the reorganization of trade unions in line with the new political-economic order was started nearly a month after EPRDF controlled Addis Ababa. Even though workers were allowed to establish an independent national confederation, it could not last long. It was rather dismantled by the government after eight months and was replaced by a very subordinate one.

This epilogue tries to outline how the new political change engineered by EPRDF reshaped the relationship between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia along with the new socio-economic and political development of the country. It also tries to assess the continuities and

¹Mehari Redae, " The Legal Framework for Trade Unionism in Ethiopia: A Historical Perspective," *Law, Social Justice and Development Journal*, 2013, p. 17.

discontinuities in the relation between trade unions and the state in Ethiopia after the EPRDF abandoned socialism and adopted revolutionary democracy and free market economy. As the organizational structure and foreign relations of trade unions were influenced by the ideology of the former regime, the EPRDF also inevitably brought significant changes to trade union organization too. Thus, the epilogue also tries to elucidate how the Ethiopian Trade Unions (ETU) was dissolved and replaced by an independent confederation, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU), which lasted only for eight months and later was replaced by a very subordinate national confederation.

Trade Unions and the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), 1991-1995

On 16 June 1991, the office of Tamrat Laynè, the Acting Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of Ethiopia, issued an order to run the bureaucracy of the country. The order dissolved the Ministry of Interior, Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) and all Mass Organizations, including the Ethiopian Trade Unions (ETU). Article 1/2 of the order noted that: "...ኢሰፓና ኢሰፓ የመሰረታቸው ማህበራት ይፈርሳሉ። ፓርቲ ኮሚቴና መሰረታዊ ድርጅት እንደመዋቅር መጠን ህገወጥ ናቸው። ጽፈትቤታቸው ይዘጋል። ደክሜንታቸውን ኢህአዴግ ይቆጣጠረዋል። ኢሰፓ ያቋቋማቸው ማህበራትም ይፈርሳሉ። ገንዘብና ንብረታቸው በመንግስት ቁጥጥር ሥር የሆናል።"² Thus, one can argue that the order virtually abrogated the former labour proclamations and abolished workers' organizations in the country. Undoubtedly, the order can be considered as an obituary of the ETU.

²"...WPE and mass organizations established by WPE would be dissolved. Party committee and cell as structure are illegal. Their office would be closed. Their document would be controlled by EPRDF. Mass organizations established by WPE would be dismantled. Their asset and property would come under the control of the government." See also *Addis Zäman, Sänè* 13, 1983EC (20 June 1991).

True, the organizational structure of ETU had already begun to disintegrate immediately after the fall of Addis Ababa to the EPRDF. Since most of the executive and council members of ETU were at the same time members of the WPE, they abandoned the organization and put themselves out of sight for fear of reprisals. But, many of them were later apprehended and thrown into prison. On the other hand, Tadässa Tamrat, the president of ETU who led the organization from 1982 to 1991 and served as a member of the Central Committee of WPE, committed suicide on 30 May 1991.³ Thus, one can argue that ETU had virtually no leadership and its organizational structure had totally disintegrated and it had ceased to function as of 28 May 1991.

Figure EP.1 Tadässa Tamrat, the President of AETU/ETU (1982-1991)



Source: *Voice of AETU*, Special Issue, *Mäskäräm* 2, 1972EC (12 September 1979)

Be that as it may, some workers from the headquarters of ETU requested the leaders of EPRDF to establish a committee that would protect the office and properties of the organization until a

³Informants: Berhanähiwot Libanos, Gëtačäw Mängäša and Gëtačäw Yosëf.

new national confederation would be organized. Accordingly, the leaders of EPRDF organized a caretaker committee composed of seven members. Among the seven committee members, six of them were selected from the headquarters of ETU who were serving the organization as experts. The chairman of the committee, Yohannes Täfäri, however, was picked from the defunct executive committee of ETU apparently because of his personal connection with the people in power. He had been serving as the General Secretary of ETU since 1986. On top of the committee, the EPRDF appointed Dawit Yohannes, who later served as a speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives, as a patron. Despite the presence of the caretaker committee in the office of the defunct ETU, however, the government continued to use the office and take the properties of the organization.⁴

Even though the leaders of EPRDF issued an order to abolish ETU and its structure, they did not deny the workers' right to establish a new organization. They rather called workers' representatives from all plants in and around Addis Ababa for a meeting at the National Theatre on 24 June 1991 to discuss the changes in the country. After they discussed the situation of the country, the leaders of EPRDF allowed workers to establish their own organization at plant level and struggle against the remnants of the WPE. They also urged them to exclude members of the WPE from the newly established organization.⁵ Thus, one can argue that the reorganization of basic trade unions at plant level was started even before the promulgation of the new labour law. While the reorganization of trade unions at plant level was going on, an international conference was held in Addis Ababa from 1 to 5 July 1991 and the representatives of different ethnic liberation fronts, political parties, mass organizations and prominent individuals ratified a

⁴*Ibid.* CETU, *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, *Miyaziya* 1986 EC (April 1996).

⁵*Addis Zämän*, *Sänè* 19, 1983 EC (26 June 1991).

Transitional Charter and established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). Among other things, the Charter clearly stated the need for promulgating a new labour law that could protect the benefits and rights of the working class. Article 9/*t* of the Charter, for instance, stated that "... የሠራተኛውን መብቶችና ጥቅሞች የሚያስጠብቅ ፍትህዊ የአሠሪና ሠራተኛ ህግ እንዲወጣ ያደርጋል።"⁶ In addition, even though Article 7 of the Charter gave priority to ethnic liberation movements, political parties and prominent individuals to be members of parliament,⁷ it also reserved three out of the 87 seats for the Ethiopian working class. Accordingly, Assäfa Wodajo, Täsfayè Gäbrä Eyäsus and Tadässä Mängestu were picked by the EPRDF and joined the parliament on behalf of the working class.⁸ They were not, however, elected by workers; rather they were simply handpicked by the EPRDF. As a result, after the reorganization of the national confederation, the newly elected president wrote a letter to Täsfayä Habiso, the secretary of the office of the parliament, on 13 January 1994 requesting for the replacement of the three individuals by the true representatives of the working class.⁹ Until they were removed from the parliament following the request of the executive committee of CETU, however, the three representatives actively participated in the promulgation of the new labour law and the reorganization of the national confederation.

To deal with the prevailing problems of workers across the country, the prime minister of the EPRDF also issued an order and established an appeal committee on 24 July 1991. It was instituted inside MoLSA and led by the president of the High Court. The committee consisted of 2 persons from workers, 2 persons from MoLSA, 2 persons from employers and a person from

⁶"...The [government] would promulgate a just labour law that protects the benefits and rights of workers." See also The Transitional Charter of Ethiopia, *Hämlè* 15, 1983EC (22 July 1991).

⁷The Transitional Charter of Ethiopia, *Hämlè* 15, 1983EC (22 July 1991).

⁸*Addis Zämän*, *Sänè* 29, 1983 EC (6 July 1991); *Genbot* 25, 1985EC (2 June 1993).

⁹ *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 2, No.1, September 1994.

the EPRDF. The committee was empowered to receive appeals on labour cases and resolve unsettled labour disputes across the country by either taking administrative measures or by arranging reconciliation mechanisms or by referring them to the court. It worked as per the provisions of Proclamation No.64/1975 until the new labour law was promulgated.¹⁰

The committee was, however, unable to solve the problems of workers as expected. Thus, the prime minister of the TGE dissolved the committee and replaced it with a Labour Investigation Command Post on 1 June 1992. The command post comprised of labour experts from the Ministry of Justice and MoLSA. It was empowered to investigate labour cases and refer them either to the court or the arbitration committee or the work litigation committee for decision.¹¹ Though the command post worked hard to bring labour under government's firm control, it could not resolve the problems of workers across the country.

While the reorganization of workers going on at a plant level and MoLSA was striving to solve the problems of workers in accordance with the former labour laws, the TGE engaged in drafting a new labour law in place of Proclamation No.64/1975 and Proclamation No.222/1982. Accordingly, after a series of discussions among the representatives of workers, employers and MoLSA, parliament promulgated the new labour law as Proclamation No. 42/1993 in its 57th regular meeting held from 22 to 29 October 1992.¹² The law came into force on 20 January 1993.¹³

¹⁰ *Addis Zämän Hämlè* 18, 1983 EC (25 July 1991).

¹¹ *Addis Zämän, Genbot* 27, 1984 EC (4 May 1992).

¹² *Addis Zämän Teqmet* 21, 1985 EC (31 October 1992).

¹³ *Nägarit Gazèta*, Proclamation No.42/1993, 20th January 1993.

Besides incorporating legal provisions that could change the organizational structure and modus operandi of trade unions, the new labour proclamation introduced provisions that could improve labour relations in the country. The proclamation also incorporated provisions that guaranteed employers the right to form associations. As a result, it brought tripartism back to the labour relations of the country. Article 113/1 of the proclamation, for instance, stated that "... workers and employers have the right to establish and form trade unions or employers' associations, respectively, and actively participate therein." The proclamation also included provisions that guaranteed workers and employers the right to strike and lockout respectively. For instance, Article 157/1 stated that "...workers have the right to strike to protect their interest in the manner prescribed in this proclamation." and Article 157/2 also dictated that "...employers have the right to lockout in the manner prescribed in this proclamation." Be that as it may, like other proclamations promulgated before it, the new labour law, failed to incorporate provisions for minimum wage.¹⁴ Thus, the question of fixing minimum wage still remains a question in the Ethiopian labour movement.

On the other hand, like the previous labour laws promulgated by the *Därg* regime, the new labour law declared 20 persons to be the minimum number of workers required to form a trade union. Article 114/2 of the new labour law also allowed enterprises engaged in similar activities that had less than twenty workers to form a general trade union jointly. Trade unions and general trade unions which were established in enterprises that engaged in similar activities/productions were also allowed jointly to form a federation. The nine federations in turn together created the national confederation. Article 114/3 of the proclamation dictated that "...trade unions may jointly form federations and federations may jointly form confederations." The administration of

¹⁴*Ibid.*

the new confederation was also organized on the basis of bottom-up organizational structure as opposed to AETU/ETU which followed a top-down approach.¹⁵

Nearly four months after the promulgation the new labour law, the workers were allowed to establish a national confederation as per the provision of the law. Accordingly, workers representatives from more than 400 plants across the country held a meeting in Addis Ababa from 7 to 8 June 1993 and established a Commission to Organize the National Trade Union Confederation. The commission had 28 members elected from 14 different plants. The meeting was chaired by Assäfa Wodajo, one of the workers' representatives in parliament; urged the commission to help workers who were not yet organized as a trade union at a plant level to get organized. After they concluded the reorganization of basic trade unions at plant level, they continued to organize them as federation and then as confederation within three months in accordance with the provision of Proclamation No. 42/1993. It started its work on 9 June 1993 under the leadership of Mäkuria Gäbrä Mädhén, the leader of *Fafa* Food Factory Workers' Union. He was also supported by Ayalëw Araya from Ethiopian Water Construction Workers' Union as vice-chairman and Amarä Mähari from Giyon Hotel Workers' Union as secretary and the remaining 25 members of the commission.¹⁶ The commission, however, failed to finalize its job as planned within three months because of financial and logistic constraints, and lack of cooperation from some employers.¹⁷

Regardless of the delay in the schedule, however, the commission called nearly 1500 representatives from 482 basic trade unions for a meeting at the Ministry of Planning and

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Addis Zämän, Sänè* 2, 1985EC (9 June 1993); *Addis Zämän, Sänè* 3, 1985EC (10 June 1993).

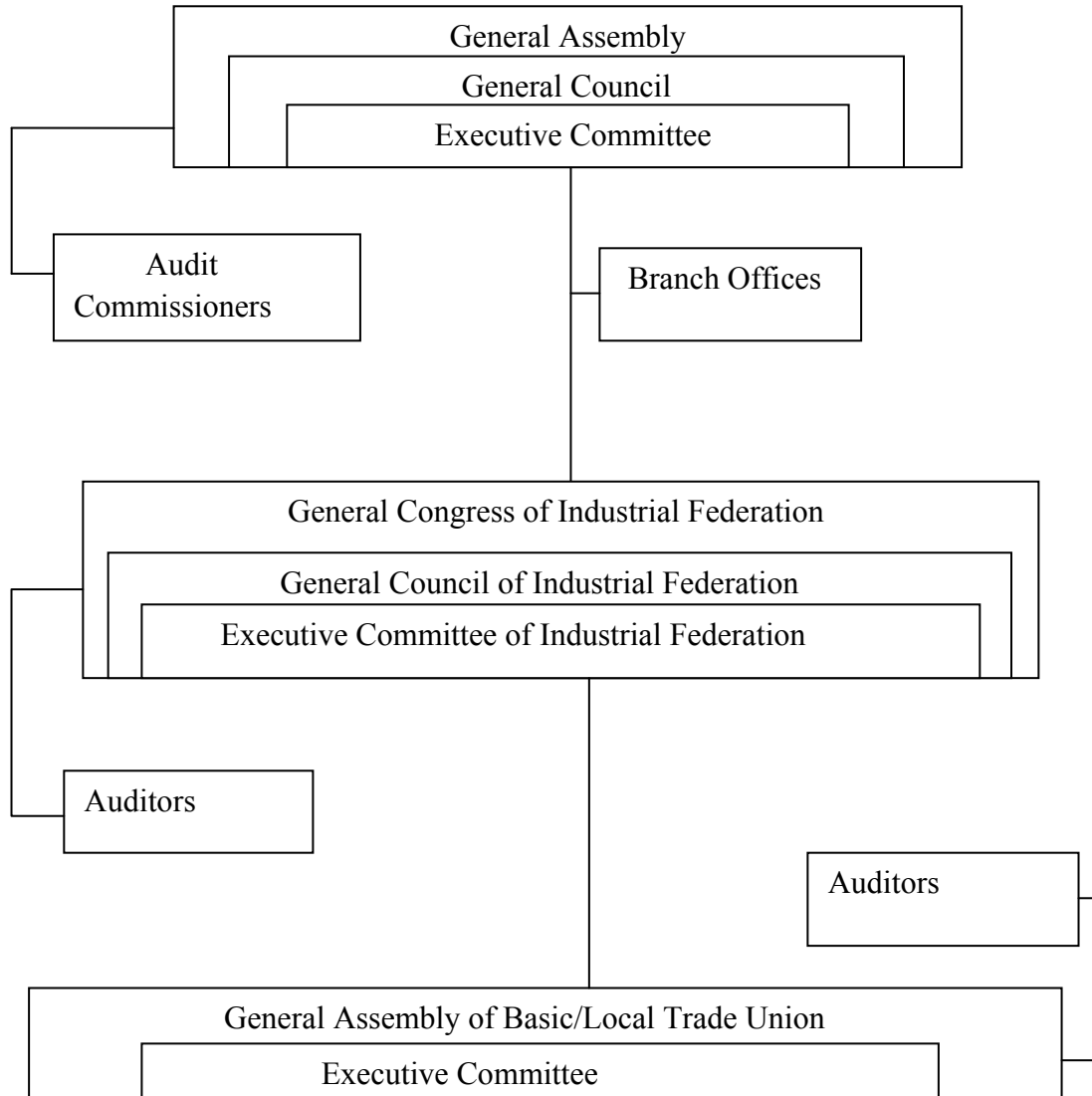
¹⁷ MoLSA, Box No. 4, File No. 7.1/0/k3/1, A letter written from the Commission to MoLSA requesting for support letter, *Sänè* 21, 1985 EC (28 June 1993).

Economic Development's hall from 15 to 29 November 1993 and established the national confederation, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU). In the first two days of the meeting, nine industrial federations were organized and their quota in the establishment of the national confederation was fixed as per the number of their affiliated basic trade union members.¹⁸ Most of the remaining days were devoted to discussion of each article of the constitution of the confederation. On 29 November 1993, in the presence of 600 workers drawn from 9 federations and representatives from ILO, ICFTU, AALC, Sudan Trade Unions and Eritrean Trade Unions, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU) was officially established. A few weeks later, CETU was registered at MoLSA and got registration certificate and legal personality on 17 December 1993.¹⁹

¹⁸*Addis Zämān, Hedar* 7, 1986 EC (16 November 1993).

¹⁹MoLSA, Box No. 4 File No. 7.1/0//h3/1, A letter written from Dawi Ibrahim to MoLSA requesting for registration and recognition of CETU, *Tahesas* 7, 1986EC (16 December 1993); *Addis Zämān, Hedar* 21, 1986 EC (30 November 1993).

Figure EP.2 The Organizational Structure of CETU



Source: The Constitution of CETU, *Hedar* 21, 1986EC (30November 1993), p. 5.

The meeting was concluded by electing nine executive committee members to run the day to day activities of the confederation. Three workers were also elected as audit commissioners of the confederation. The executive committee members and the federations from which they were elected are listed below.

Table 9 -The Executive Committee of CETU

Name	Federation	Position
Dawi Ibrahim	Hotel, Tourism and General Service	President
Abäbä Abära	Transport and Communication	Vice President
Mäkuria Gäbrä Mädhén	Food, Beverages and Tobacco	General Secretary
Solomon Wondayähu	Bank and Insurance	Vice Secretary
Dämessè Olèma	Commerce, Technic and Printing	Treasurer
Fäqadu Häylu	Textile, Leather and Tailor	Member
Şagayä Tädla	National Agriculture, Plantation, Fishery and Agro-Industry	Member
Häbtu Gäbrä Hiwot	Construction, Metal and Wood Works	Member
Husèn Kāmal	Energy, Chemical, Petroleum and Mineral	Member

Source: MoLSA, Box No. 4, File No. 7.1/0/ħ3/1, A letter written from Dawi Ibrahim to MoLSA requesting for registration and recognition of CETU, *Tahesas* 7, 1986EC (16 December 1993).

Even though workers were able to reorganize their confederation without the intervention of the TGE, the confederation faced setbacks to regain all its properties and assets. Be that as it may, it continued to work as an independent organization for about eight months. But, the relationship between CETU and the TGE was marked by lack of cooperation throughout those months. For instance, despite CETU's reiterated demand for the release of its blocked assets and looted properties, the TGE refused to give appropriate action. In addition, the government denied the leaders of CETU the chance to participate in the socio-economic policy formulation and endorsing process in general and in the labour policy making process in particular. In his press release to local and international journalists on 9 August 1994, Dawi Ibrahim succinctly

described TGE's indifference towards the demands of workers that CETU raised for the last eight months since its establishment. He stated that: "...የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ሕጋዊ ተወካይ የሆኑት የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኛ ማህበራት ያቋቋሙት ኮንፌዴሬሽን ለመንግሥት በተከታታይ ያቀረብናቸው የሠራተኛ ችግሮች ተጨባጭ ምላሽ ያልተሰጠባቸው ሲሆን፡ ማህበሩም በሀገሪቱ የልማትና የዕድገት ፖሊሲዎች ተፈላጊውን ሚና ሊጫወት የሚችልበት የተሳተፈ መድረክም ተነፍጎት ይገኛል።"²⁰

Thus, it can be argued that despite CETU's desire to be an independent and legally recognized mass organization to participate in the country's socio-economic policy formulation and ratification process, the TGE created different obstacles that prevented it from such engagements. On the other hand, Dawi and some members of the General Council continued to disregard the new political developments and challenged the staggering TGE. The content and tone of Dawi's statements enraged the still unsettled TGE.²¹ This indicates that the leadership of CETU was also to some degree responsible for the deterioration of the relation between the confederation and the TGE.

The serious contradiction between CETU and the TGE started in August 1994 when the latter introduced an economic reform program, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). The program was initiated by the TGE with the support of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and African Development Fund (ADF) to reconstruct and rehabilitate the war-damaged economy of the country by undertaking a wide range of reforms in the period between

²⁰"...The confederation which was organized by representatives of the Ethiopian workers, trade unions was not only denied by the government to get answers for the problems that it has repeatedly demanded but also denied to get the platform that it could play the necessary role on the country's growth and development policies."; See also *Voice of Labour*, Vol.1, No.3, *Nähäse* 1986 EC (August 1994).

²¹Bertus Praeg, *Ethiopia and Political Renaissance in Africa* (Pretoria: Nova Science Publishers, 2006), p. 186.

1993 and 1996. The TGE prepared a Policy Framework Paper (PFP) with the support of World Bank and IMF in September 1992 and the implementation of SAP was started on 8 July 1994.²²

SAP mainly aimed at supporting the government's endeavor to undertake macroeconomic stabilization, structural reforms and sustainable development in the country. Among other things, the program focused on reforming the country's fiscal policy, monetary policy, investment and industry, pricing and distribution, wages and employment, public enterprises and poverty reduction. Regarding investment and industrial reform, the program supported the TGE to stimulate the private sector by privatizing some state enterprises.²³ Even though the workers faced the impact of all the structural reforms undertaken in all sectors of the economy, they mainly opposed the privatization of state enterprises that made a number of workers redundant.

Even though Ethiopian workers had begun to feel the impact of SAP since the beginning of its implementation on 8 July 1994, the leaders of CETU did not express their resentment against the program for nearly a month. They had been giving seminars to member unions about the pros and cons of the program. In his press release to local and international journalists on 9 August 1994, however, Dawi Ibrahim, the president of CETU explicitly disclosed the adverse impacts of SAP on Ethiopian workers. The president stated that: "... በአለም ባንክና በአለምአቀፍ የገንዘብ ድርጅት ግፊት በታዳጊ አገሮች ኢኮኖሚያዊ መዋቅር ላይ ማስተካከያ እንዲደረግ የተነደፈው ፕሮግራም የየሀገሩን ሁኔታ ያላገናዘበ በመሆኑ እንቃወማለን። ...የፕሮግራሙ አፈጻጸም ሳይለወጥና ሳይሸሻል ወይም ምክክር ሳይደረግበት እንዲሁ በቀኖናዊነት መከናወኑ ለሠራተኞች

²²*Voice of Labour*, Vol. I, No. 3; Eshetu Chole, "A Preliminary Appraisal of Ethiopia's Economic Reform 1991-1993," in Harold G. Marcus (ed.) *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies: Papers of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Michigan State University 5-10 September 1994, p. 314; Solomon Deneke, "Private Sector Development in Ethiopia," *International Conference in African Development Archives*, Western Michigan University: Center for African Development Policy Research, 2001, p. 5.

²³Eshetu Chole, p. 315.

ከስራ መፈናቀልና ለኑሮ ስጋት መባባስ ከፍተኛ የሆነ አሉታዊ ተፅዕኖ በማድረስ ላይ ይገኛል።²⁴ Regarding the damaging impact of the program, Dawi further stressed that: "... [ፕሮግራሙ] በሀገራችን በ 1 ወር ጊዜ ውስጥ ወደ 6000 የሚጠጉ ሠራተኞች በማፈናቀል አደገኛነቱን አስመስክሯል።"²⁵

Following the president's press release, the prime minister's office sent a letter to CETU on 31 August 1994 expressing its readiness to discuss on the SAP with the executive committee of the confederation and the nine federations. The meeting was arranged to be held at the parliament hall on 3 September 1994. Subsequently, however, the prime minister changed his mind and notified the president of CETU by phone that he wanted to discuss the matter with members of the General Council rather than with the executive members of the confederation and the nine federations. On 1 September 1994, the president, however, replied that he could not call members of the General Council who were living across Ethiopia within such a short time and requested the office to discuss with the executive committee.²⁶ But, the office refused and the meeting was cancelled.

Offended by the reply of the president of CETU, the TGE began to work clandestinely with some members of the General Council and the executive committee of the confederation to quell the anti SAP labour movement and remove the president of the confederation. This eventually bore fruit and resulted in the birth of a pro government group that comprised of individuals from

²⁴"...We opposed the Structural Adjustment Program prepared with the influence of World Bank and IMF to bring economic reform in developing countries. ...since the program is implemented with no change and improvement or without any consultation merely on the basis of principles, it has been creating adverse impacts on workers to be laid-off and consternated with their precarious living conditions." See also *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1 No. 3, *Nähäse* 1986 EC (9 August 1994).

²⁵"... in our country, [the program] has proved its dangerousness by making 6000 workers laid-off within a month." See also *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1 No.3, *Nähäse* 1986 EC (9 August 1994).

²⁶MoLSA, Box No. 4 File No. 7.1/0/አ3/1, A letter written from Dawi Ibrahim to the office of prime minister requesting it to arrange a discussion on the SAP with the executive committee of CELU. *Nähäse* 26, 1986 EC (1 August 1994).

the executive committee and the General Council of the confederation. The group was named "የሰላምና ነፃ የሥራተኛ ማህበር ፈላጊ" "Peace and Free Trade Union Seekers" and was led by Mäkuria Gäbrä Mädhén, the General Secretary of CETU. He was the mastermind of the group. Besides persuading his federation, Food, Beverage and Tobacco, to oppose Dawi's press release and support the SAP, he served as a bridge between the group and the TGE. For instance, Mäkuria and the executive committee members of the federation expressed their support to SAP and had a discussion with the prime minister on the problem of the confederation on 2 September 1994.²⁷

Be that as it may, the executive committee of CETU called the General Council for an extraordinary meeting that was held from 10 August 1994 to 20 September 1994.²⁸ The executive committee arranged the meeting to clarify the confusion created among the workers in general and members of the General Council in particular. The General Council also hoped to pass decision concerning the workers who were affected by the implementation of the SAP. Nevertheless, the meeting was marred by disagreements and conflicts between Dawi and his supporters on the one hand and the pro government group on the other. For instance, it took the General Council two days to set the agenda of the meeting. Moreover, the pro government group walked out of the meeting on the ground that it was held in violation of the constitution. Consequently, the General council as per the decision it made on 18 September 1994 took disciplinary measures on some of its members and suspended 26 members of the General Council and three members of the executive committee as of 19 September 1994 until the next

²⁷ *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 2, No. 1, *Mäskäräm* 1987 EC (September 1994).

²⁸ *Ibid*,

General Congress meeting.²⁹ But, since the majority of suspended members were ethnic Tigreans, the decision further deteriorated CETU's relation with the TGE.

Figure EP. 3 Dawi Ibrahim and Members of the General Council attending the Extraordinary Meeting



Source: *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 2, No. 1, *Mäskäräm* 1987 EC/September 1994.

On the other hand, annoyed by the decision of the General Council, the pro government group who had walked out of the meeting issued a separate resolution on 18 September 1994 against the extraordinary meeting which they thought unconstitutional and sent a copy to MoLSA.³⁰ Even though the pro government group accused Dawi and his supporters mainly for their firm stand against SAP, they also denounced them for working against the bylaws or constitution of the confederation. On 20 September 1994, around 35 members of the General Council who opposed the special meeting signed a petition and submitted it to the MoLSA requesting an

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰MoLSA, Box No. 4 File No. 7.1/0/h3/1, A separate resolution passed by some members of the General Council who called themselves "Peace and Free Trade Union Seekers) against the General Council special meeting in *Mäskäräm* 8, 1987EC (18 September 1994).

immediate solution for the prevailing problems inside the confederation because of Dawi and his supporters.³¹ They demonized Dawi, labeling him as an opponent of the government and that he was using the confederation to achieve his political end. But, that was all made apparently to put pressure on him and remove him from power.

On 22 September 1994, the pro government group issued a press release and wrote a letter to MoLSA requesting it to take legal action against the confederation and stop all its activities until the next General Congress meeting. In the letter, they also urged MoLSA to block the bank account of the confederation. They further stated that: "...በመሆኑም ከዚህ በታች በስማችንና በማህተማችን በማረጋገጥ የ6 የኢሰማኮ አባል ፌዴሬሽኖች ህብረት የሚኒስትር መ/ቤቱ ከአዋጅ 42/85፣ ከህገ ማህበሩና ከተዛማጅ ሕጎች ጋር በማገናኘብ፣ በኢሰማኮ ህገማህበር አንቀጽ 16.2 2/3 ፌዴሬሽኖች ውሳኔ መሰረት ጠቅላላ ጉባኤ እስኪጠራ ድረስ ኮንፌዴሬሽኑ በሕግ እንዲታገድ እንጠይቃለን።"³² Thus, one can argue that the activities of CETU had been severely disrupted since the end of the General Council's extraordinary meeting that ended up without any tangible result on 20 September 1994.

As tension mounted between Dawi and the three federations (Bank and Insurance Federation, Hotel, Tourism and General Service Federation and Commerce, Technic and Printing Federation) on the one hand and the "Peace and Free Trade Union Seekers" and the remaining six federations (Construction, Metal and Wood Work Federation, Food, Beverages and Tobacco Federation, Textile, Leather, and Tailor Federation, Transport and communication

³¹ *Ibid*, a letter written from the "Peace and Free Trade Union Seekers) to the MoLSA requesting for solutions to the problems created inside the confederation in *Mäskäräm* 10, 1987EC (20 September 1994).

³² "... Thus, by confirming with our names and stamps hereunder, we members of the union of the 6th federations requested the office of the MoLSA to consult Proclamation No. 42/85, the confederation's constitution and other related laws and legally block the confederation until the next General Congress is called as per Article 16.2 of the confederation and two-third majority decision of the federations." See also *Ibid*, a letter written from the union of six federations to the MoLSA requesting for a harsh measure to be taken against the confederation in *Mäskäräm* 12, 1987EC (22 September 1994).

Federation, National Agriculture, Plantation, Fishery and Agro- Industry Federation, and Energy, Chemical, Petroleum and Mineral Federation) on the other, the TGE continued to support the latter group both overtly and covertly. For instance, the TGE organized a committee led by Dästa Woldä Mariam, the vice minister of MoLSA, to mediate between the two factions in late September 1994. Nevertheless, since the two factions were unable to agree on some of the agenda items proposed, the mediation ended without any result. The agenda item asking Dawi and his supporters to reinstate the suspended members of the pro government group was the core issue of their disagreement.³³

When MoLSA failed to reconcile the two factions, it closed the office of CETU on 26 October 1994. But, Dawi and his supporters opposed the action of the Ministry and took the case to court. The court ruled for the opening of the confederation on 28 October 1994. Nevertheless, MoLSA further took a serious measure against the confederation by cancelling its certificate of registration on 6 December 1994. Though the court again ruled for the opening of CETU on 12 December 1994, it revoked its decision on 16 December 1994 and the appeal and litigation continued for more than two years.³⁴

On the other hand, the TGE continued to work with the pro government faction using all its bureaucracy to convince the remaining three federations to organize a subordinate national confederation. The offices of EPRDF in Addis Ababa took the responsibility of either convincing them and bring all the affiliated unions of the three federations or dismantling them by using

³³ *Addis Zäman*, *Teqmet* 15, 1987 EC (25 October 1994).

³⁴ Praeg, p.187.

some of their members who were pro-government. It also started to influence the management of several companies to dismantle and reorganize trade unions by any means they could.³⁵

With the covert and overt support of the government, the pro government group managed to control the Hotel and Tourism, and General Service Federation without any serious struggle. But, the Commerce, Technic and Printing Federation and Bank and Insurance Federation continued their defiance of the government backed group. The struggle of the former ended shortly after its office was closed on 4 November 1996 and it joined the pro government group. The struggle of the latter, however, continued for some years even after CETU was reorganized.³⁶

Thereafter, since the eight federations came under their control and the remaining one continued in defiance of the veteran CETU, the pro government group issued a four point declaration on 4 January 1997. The declaration stated that the eight federations were ready to reorganize the Confederation of the Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU) and to administer its property and assets. To this effect, they organized a 16 man ad-hoc coordinating committee to facilitate the reorganization of CETU.³⁷ Even though their move was apparently supported by the government, they had no legal ground to reorganize a national confederation while the first still legally existed.

Nevertheless, while the case was pending in court, the pro government group continued to reorganize the confederation. But, Dawi opposed the illegal move of the pro government group by writing a letter to Hässän Abdälla, Minister of MoLSA. In his letter, Dawi pointed out that the

³⁵Ethiopian Register, Vol. 4, No. 6, June 1997, p.49

³⁶Praeg, p.189.

³⁷Ethiopian Register, Vol. 4, No. 2, February 1997, p. 13.

newly organized committee had no legal or constitutional mandate to terminate CETU's legal status, reorganize CETU and replace it and assume its functions, or violate the resolutions of the General Congress of the Ethiopian workers. He further requested the Ministry to ensure respect for the rule of law and not to give any permission to set up any committee and start to reorganize any trade unions before the court made a final ruling on the dispute over the cancellation of CETU's registration certificate.³⁸

Despite Dawi's effort, however, the government-backed committee proceeded with mobilizing support for the reorganization of CETU and making official statements on the government controlled media. Not only this, government officials also began publicly expressing their support for the attempt to set up a new confederation that would replace CETU.³⁹ Thus, finally they succeeded in reorganizing and fully controlling the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU).

Even though Dawi had been under constant security surveillance for a long period of time, he continued to challenge his opponents in court. The solidarity that he got from the International Labour Organizations (ILO), International Confederations of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), African American Labour Center (AALC), Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) and others apparently helped him to remain adamant. On 18 April 1997, however, Dawi left both CETU and Ethiopia for exile. In an interview he gave from Kenya to the VOA's Amharic service on 4 May 1997, Dawi stated that he left the country because he faced life-threatening intimidation more than ever before. He added that:

³⁸*Ibid*, p.14.

³⁹*Ibid*.

...he was forced to flee the country because he had received reliable information from sources inside the TPLF security that the government was planning to jail him on some trumped up charges. He also said that he had been under constant security surveillance for a long period of time and that there were even unsuccessful attempts to abduct and kill him.⁴⁰

Immediately after Dawi fled the country, the pro-government group called a meeting which was held from 22 to 24 April 1997. At the end of the meeting, they endorsed the revised constitution, reorganized CETU and elected its new leaders. Accordingly, Amarä Alämayähu from the textile, leather and tailor federation was elected as the president of the reorganized CETU. Surprisingly enough, while all this was going on, the court did not yet rule out the cancellation of the old CETU. True, MoLSA had already the information that the court would rule the case in its favor sooner or later. As expected, the court ruled in favor of MoLSA and the registration certificate and legal personality of the old CETU was cancelled on 2 May 1997.⁴¹ This heralded the establishment of a clearly subordinate CETU on the grave of the old CETU which had been struggling to become independent.

In general, even though the TGE allowed the Ethiopian workers to establish an independent confederation, it did not last long. It rather ceased to exist after eight months. The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program was the main factor that affected the relation between CETU and the TGE. Instead of responding to the concern of the confederation, the TGE launched overt and covert attacks on the confederation and finally brought it to heel. Thus, one can argue that the formation of an independent trade union in Ethiopia is still an unfinished business.

⁴⁰Ethiopian Register, Vol.4, No. 6, June 1997, p.13.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

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LIST OF INFORMANTS

No	Name	Title	Age	Date and Place of Interview	Remarks
1	Abära Abäbä	<i>Ato</i>	76	10/5/2015 Addis Ababa	He was one of the founders of Mozvold Workers' Union and the Confederation of Ethiopian Workers' Union. He also worked as auditor of CELU for two terms since 1963.
2	Abreham Mäkonän	<i>Ato</i>	78	21/9/2016 Addis Ababa	He was one of the founders of the Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union and the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions. He was also the first president of the confederation.
3	Ahmäd Mohammäd	<i>Ato</i>	59	27/9/2014 Addis Ababa	He was a member of 101 st militia brigade. He participated in several battles from Fiq to Qäbridahar.
4	Alämu Yasin	<i>Ato</i>	65	27/9/2014 Addis Ababa	He was a member of the 100 th militia brigade. He fought against the Somalia insurgents at Afdäm and Bekè

5	Aräga Enešaw	<i>Ato</i>	60	27/03/2015 Nazareth	He was the representative of COPWE in Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union.
6	Beyene Solomon	<i>Ato</i>	81	27/2/ 2015 Washington	He was the president of CELU from April 1965 to September 1974. He led CELU for three terms. I interviewed him through phone. Though he promised me to come on September 2015, but he failed to come until the completion of the thesis.
7	Berhanä Hiwot Libanos	<i>Ato</i>	57	26/9/2014 Addis Ababa	He has been working in the confederation as an expert in finance and human resource management since 1976.
8	Berhānu Mamo	<i>Ato</i>	72	26/03/2015 Nazareth	He was one of the ring leaders of <i>Meison</i> Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union along with Milkiso Olènjo.
9	Dāmes Bongär	<i>Ato</i>	60	27/9/2014 Addis Ababa	He was a member of 101 st militia brigade and participated in a number of battles from Fiq to Mustahil.

10	Dawitè Ayana	<i>W/ro</i>	70	31/12/2014 Addis Ababa	She is the wife of the late Abära Gāmu. She has vividly described the death of her husband.
11	Fākadu Amānjo	<i>Ato</i>	54	6/6/2016 Addis Ababa	He was an auditor in Fiber factory.
12	Fesseha Şeyon Tākè	<i>Ato</i>	67	21/9 2014 Addis Ababa	He was the General Secretary of CELU from 1965 to 1974.
13	Gābrä Selassè Gābrä Mariam	<i>Ato</i>	68	12 /02/2015 Addis Ababa	He was the Economic and Legal Department head of CELU from 1966 to 1973. He had also served as editor of the Voice of Labour before 1966.
14	Gälätaw Felatè	<i>Ato</i>	53	6/6/ 2016 Addis Ababa	He served as chairman of the Revolutionary Defense Squad in the Fiber Factory.
15	Gāmāču Nāga	<i>Ato</i>	62	6/6/2016 Addis Ababa	He was one of the workers who continued to work in the Fiber Factory after it was relocated from Ledäta to Aqaqi in 1970.
16	Gänät Mäläsä	<i>W/ro</i>	65	27/9/2014	She was recruited from the Coffee Board and joined the 100 th militia

				Addis Ababa	brigade which was deployed along the Awaš-Assab Road.
17	Gètačāw Māngāša	<i>Ato</i>	74	31/12/2014 Addis Ababa	He served CELU at different administrative posts from 1963 to 1996.
18	Gètačāw Yosèf	<i>Ato</i>	58	26/9/2014 Addis Ababa	He is the legal advisor of CETU.
19	Kābādā Duguma	<i>Ato</i>		12/1/2015	He worked as executive committee members of Dire Dawa Textile Factory Workers' Union from 1978-1986.
20	Kātāma Kāsimo	<i>Ato</i>	75	24/4/2015 Addis Ababa	He was one of the founders of the Wonji-Šāwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union.
21	Kiflu Tadesse	<i>Ato</i>	68	14/11/2014 Amsterdam	He was one of the top leaders of EPRP and founders of the Ethiopian Workers Revolutionary Union which served as the labour wing of the party.

22	Mesfin Wolde Mariam	Prof.	85	29/06/2016 Addis Ababa	He contributed a lot to the establishment of CELU along with Professor Bereket Habte Selassie and Dr. Seyum Gebre Egziabher.
23	Negusè Lämna	<i>Ato</i>	72	5/1/2015 Dire Dawa	He was the vice-president of CELU's branch in Dire Dawa from 1978-86.
24	Šimāles Tāklè	<i>Ato</i>	67	25/03/2015 Nazreth	He was the first vice- president of Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union from 1976-1982.
25	Tadässä Amarä	<i>Ato</i>	82	5/1/2015 Dire Dawa	He was the vice-president of Dire Dawa Textile Factory Workers' Union from 1963-1966. He also participated during the establishment of the national confederation.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation is my work and that all the sources for the dissertation have been duly acknowledged.

Name: ADANE KASSIE BEZABIH

Signature_____

Place: ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

Date of Submission 15/10/2018